

COVID-19 Fact Sheet:

Middle East and North Africa, Week of July 17, 2020



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OVERVIEW

As of July 17, 1,623,796 positive cases of coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) have been reported across the Middle East and North Africa (MENA), including 39,679 deaths. The number of confirmed coronavirus cases in the region remains on an upward trajectory; however, the rate of new infections and deaths has begun to stabilize, suggesting that the overall curve may begin to plateau soon. However, several countries continue to experience an increase in daily case jumps. In particular, Israel and Algeria have experienced surges in infections over the past two weeks. Likewise, transmission rates have increased in Iran, Lebanon, Libya, and Tunisia. Many officials have attributed this trend to citizens shunning social distancing and other anti-virus measures, though some governments maintain that the spike in cases is due in large part to increased testing. Additionally, with all MENA countries in the midst of plans to partially, if not completely, lift anti-COVID-19 measures, increased movement, social interactions, and the reopening of economic activities has also likely contributed to an increase in cases. Other countries, including most Gulf states, appear to be gaining control of their coronavirus outbreaks.

In select nations where the outbreak continues to spread, such as Pakistan, Israel, and the Palestinian territories, governments have employed localized lockdowns that target COVID-19 hotspots. Officials are also acutely aware of the threat posed by the upcoming Eid al Adha holiday, planned for July 30 this year, as Muslims commonly frequent cattle markets, souks, butchers, and shops in anticipation of the holiday, which have the potential to be vectors for transmission of the virus. Several governments have begun to outline precautionary measures leading up to the day, as the previous Eid al Fitr holiday at the end of May led to a spike in cases in many Muslim-majority countries. However, most MENA nations continue to lift restrictions, and many have expressed intentions to remove COVID-19 movement restrictions following the conclusion of Eid al Adha. In particular, the region is witnessing an increase in reopening land borders and resuming international travel. If cases should surge again, this could prompt the reintroduction of lockdown measures in affected areas and lead to new disruptions to businesses, supply chains, and travel.

COVID-19 Cases in the Middle East and North Africa as of July 17

Country/Territory	Cases	Deaths	Recovered
Afghanistan	35,229	1147	23,151
Algeria	21,948	1057	15,430
Bahrain	35,084	121	30,809
Egypt	85,771	4,120	26,691
Iran	269,440	13,791	232,873
Iraq	88,171	3,616	56,495
Israel	47,459	392	20,744
Jordan	1,209	10	1021
Kuwait	58,221	404	48,381
Lebanon	2,599	40	1,485
Libya	1652	46	379
Morocco	16,638	263	14,175
Oman	64,193	298	41,450
Pakistan	259,999	5,475	183,737
Palestinian Territories	7,764	51	1492
Qatar	105,898	153	102,597
Saudi Arabia	245,851	2,407	191,161
Syria	477	22	140
Tunisia	1,336	50	1,095
Turkey	216,873	5,440	198,820
United Arab Emirates	56,422	337	48,448
Western Sahara	10	1	8
Yemen	1,552	438	695
Total	1,623,796	39679	1,241,277

KEY TRENDS

- + Official data suggests that the rate of new infections in the MENA remained relatively unchanged over the past two weeks. As of July 17, the region's overall case tally had increased by 23.6 percent since July 2, compared to approximately 23.14 percent between June 20 and July 1.
- + Most MENA countries have witnessed a decrease in the rate of infection over the past two weeks, with Jordan (6.71%), Turkey (7.84%), and Qatar (9.17%), recording the smallest increases.
- + Pakistan has continued a downward trend in daily incidence since its peak last month, falling to number 12 globally in terms of daily incidence, according to a July 17 report by Johns Hopkins.

- + Though the rate of infection decreased somewhat in the Palestinian territories over the past two weeks, the outbreak in this area continues to spread, with the highest death toll ever recorded on July 16, at seven deaths.
- + Though most Gulf countries appear to have gained control over their respective outbreaks, they continue to represent the top countries in the world in terms of per capita incidence: Bahrain (#1), Oman (#2), Qatar (#8), Kuwait (#7), and Saudi Arabia (#13).
- + Israel's and Algeria's rates of infection (82.39% and 53.78%, respectively) have surged in the past two weeks as authorities struggle to contain their country's respective outbreaks.

LATEST COVID-19 RESTRICTIONS AND DEVELOPMENTS BY COUNTRY/TERRITORY

AFGHANISTAN

Although the coronavirus continues to spread throughout Afghanistan, daily incidence continues to steadily decrease, since a peak in early June. Even so, daily deaths continue to increase, with the highest daily death toll reported on July 15, at 46 deaths. This spike suggests that the actual toll of the pandemic is higher than official data suggests, due to under-reporting, limited testing capabilities, and weak healthcare systems. Restrictions still in place include the mandatory use of face masks in public places, social distancing, and a ban on gatherings of more than ten people. Additionally, schools, parks, and all non-essential businesses, including hotels, sports facilities, and entertainment venues are to remain closed until September, though no specific reopening date has been provided. Limited international flights have resumed service from Kabul, and the land border with Iran has reopened.

ALGERIA

Algeria's COVID-19 curve continues to accelerate, as daily incidence remains elevated since its nadir at the beginning of June. In response to a rise in cases, on July 9, Algerian officials banned all movement between its 29 provinces still under and 8:00 PM to 5:00 AM local time curfew, for one week beginning on July 10, and extended the measure another ten days on July 16. The measure is now expected to remain in effect until at least July 29. Additionally, several provinces, where the COVID-19 outbreak has worsened, were placed under stricter lockdowns, including the El Tarf, Ouargla, Tipaza, M'sila, and Setif provinces. Algeria's air, land, and sea borders remain closed and face masks are mandatory in public places.

BAHRAIN

Though COVID-19 cases have been on a slight decline since the country's peak at the end of June, daily incidence remains elevated, and periodic jumps in case numbers continue to be reported. Though officials have called for the reopening of the King Fahd Causeway connecting Bahrain and Saudi Arabia after Eid al Adha, as of this writing, it remains closed to non-commercial traffic. Several

types of businesses, including salons, barbershops, and nonessential medical services have resumed, though the kingdom’s air, land, and sea borders remain closed to most foreign travelers. Face mask use remains compulsory in public places, and gatherings of more than five people remain prohibited.

EGYPT

Egypt’s COVID-19 cases have dropped off somewhat in the past two weeks, although the country continues to report elevated daily incidence of COVID-19. Nonetheless, officials continue to relax anti-virus measures. On June 27, authorities reduced the nationwide curfew to midnight to 4:00 AM local time, and also allowed cafes, clubs, gyms, places of worship, and theaters to reopen at limited capacity. Though beaches, parks, and shisha bars remain closed, Egypt reopened resorts in the South Sinai and along the Red Sea and Mediterranean coasts to international charter flights. The pyramids at Giza, along with several museums, also reopened to tourists on July 1. The use of face masks is mandatory in public spaces.

IRAN

Although COVID-19 infections in Iran appear to have stabilized slightly since its second peak on June 4, daily incidence remains elevated compared to early May, as health officials continue to report over 2,000 cases a day. In response, President Hassan Rouhani announced that face masks would be mandatory in public places on June 28, until at least July 22, and announced the closure of all wedding venues and funeral homes in Tehran on July 11. Rouhani also stated that the country’s economy cannot afford to shut down, even as the country’s outbreak continues to accelerate, with record-high death tolls recorded in recent days. Authorities retain the ability to implement localized lockdowns in areas designated as “red”, or “high risk”. In a further sign of concern, officials have stated that hospitals in Iran face shortages of medical personnel and beds, threatening to overwhelm the country’s healthcare system.

IRAQ

Though daily incidence of new infections has dropped off slightly since July 1, Iraq’s coronavirus outbreak continues to accelerate, suggesting the outbreak is not yet under control in the country. Some officials have pointed to lax attitudes among the public regarding anti-virus measures as the reason for elevated case numbers. On July 16, Iraqi authorities reduced partial curfew hours to 9:30 PM to 6:00 AM local time, with the exception of 24-hour curfews in effect on Thursdays, Fridays, and Saturdays. The curfew is expected to be completely lifted after the Eid al Adha holiday. Partial curfews reportedly remain in effect in various parts of Iraqi Kurdistan. Additionally, on July 13, Iraqi authorities extended the suspension on all scheduled flights to and from Iraq through July 22. The measure has been in effect since March 17. Iraq partially reopened the Mandali border crossing with Iran on July 11, following a three-month closure due to the pandemic. The crossing, the third to reopen following the Basra and Wasit border crossings, will reportedly be operational for two days a week for trade exchange.

MENA RESTRICTIONS AND REOPENING GUIDANCE

Country/ Territory	Lockdown/Curfew in Effect	Business Reopening Status	Compulsory Face Mask Use
	Hours (if applicable); Expiration Date	Open/Closed/Phased Reopening; Date	Yes/No
Afghanistan	Expired	Phased; May 25	Yes
Algeria	2000 to 0500 in 29 provinces; July 29	Phased; April 26	Yes, in public places
Bahrain	N/A	Phased; May 7	Yes
Egypt	0000-0400; Indefinite	Phased; April 23	Yes
Iran	N/A	Phased; April 11	Yes, in public places
Iraq	2130-0600; August 1 & 24-hour curfew on weekends	Phased; April 23	Yes
Israel	Weekend lockdown; Indefinite	Phased; April 19	Yes
Jordan	0000-0600; Indefinite	Phased; June 8	Yes
Kuwait	2000-0500; Indefinite	Phased; May 31	Yes
Lebanon	Expired	Phased; April 27	Yes
Libya	2000-0600; July 17 (GNA) & 1900-0700; Indefinite (LNA)	N/A	No
Morocco	Expired	Phased; May 29	Yes
Oman	Expired; May 29	Phased; April 28	Yes
Pakistan	"Smart" Lockdowns vary by region	Phased; May 9	Yes
Palestinian Territories	2000-0600; July 26 (West Bank)	Phased; April 17	No
Qatar	N/A	Phased; May 31	Yes
Saudi Arabia	Expired	Phased; April 29	No
Syria	Expired	Open; April 29	No
Tunisia	Expired	Phased; May 4	Yes
Turkey	Partial confinement orders for youth and senior citizens; Indefinite	Phased; May 11	Yes (most major cities)
United Arab Emirates	Expired	Phased; April 23	Yes
Western Sahara	N/A	N/A	N/A
Yemen	Local lockdowns of varying degrees; Indefinite	N/A	No

'Closed' indicates that most/all businesses being colloquially called "non-essential" have yet to reopen.

Green highlighted boxes indicate restrictions that have been modified since the previous Fact Sheet was issued on June 5.

Yellow highlighted boxes indicate restrictions that are expected to be lifted/adopted/expire within the next week.

ISRAEL

After previously having appeared to control its COVID-19 outbreak, Israel's coronavirus curve has been on an upward trajectory since late May. Indeed, cases have surged from approximately 20 new cases a day in mid-May to current incidence of more than 1,000 new cases a day, suggesting Israel is firmly in the middle of a second wave of infection. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu admitted on July 9 that restrictions on gathering places were lifted "too soon," likely leading to the spike in cases that the country is currently experiencing. The Israeli cabinet announced on July 17 that nationwide, markets, malls, hair salons, libraries, and gyms would be closed on weekends, beginning from 5:00 PM on Fridays to 5:00 AM local time on Sundays, while restaurants are limited to takeaway services through the week. The measures are in place indefinitely. Gatherings of more than 20 people outdoors, and ten people indoors are also prohibited. Local officials retain authority to institute stricter lockdowns in COVID-19 hotspots. A ban on entry by foreign nationals has been extended through at least August 1; legal residents are exempt but must undergo a 14-day self-isolation period immediately following arrival.

JORDAN

Jordan's COVID-19 curve has remained mostly stable the past two weeks, with case jumps reported on July 3, 5, and 14. Most businesses have been permitted to reopen, under strict health protocols, and limited domestic flights have resumed. On July 12, the Jordanian government announced that commercial international flights will remain suspended through at least July 24, and officials have noted they are likely to open in the first or second week in August. The nationwide nightly curfew has been shortened to midnight to 6:00 AM local time. Schools, weddings, festivals, and public parks, remain closed, and gatherings of over 20 people remain prohibited. Face masks are mandatory in public.

KUWAIT

Kuwait's COVID-19 curve appears to have stabilized, though daily incidence remains elevated from a low in the middle of June. The government continues to press forward with its five-phased coronavirus exit plan to reopen the economy completely by mid-September. A nightly curfew between 8:00 PM and 5:00 AM local time remains in effect, though shopping malls, retail shops, parks, restaurants, and cafes have been permitted to reopen at a limited capacity. The Kuwait International Airport (KWI) is expected to resume limited commercial service on August 1. The third phase is expected to begin at the end of July or beginning of August.

LEBANON

Lebanon's COVID-19 infections continue on an upward trajectory, with a significant spike in cases reported on July 12. Officials have attributed the surge in cases partly to the reopening of the Beirut airport on July 1, though clusters of infections have also been reported amongst Lebanon's migrant worker population. On June 30, Lebanon's cabinet approved the extension of the "state of general mobilization" through August 2. The move marks the government's seventh such extension since it was first adopted on March 15. Despite the continued "general mobilization", the nightly curfew between midnight and 5:00 AM local time has been lifted, along with remaining restrictions on opening hours for commercial shops. The Masnaa border crossing with Syria reopened on July 2. Public transport services are operational at a limited capacity and face mask use remains mandatory in public spaces.

LIBYA

Libya's rate of infection has remained relatively stable over the past two weeks, though the number of positive cases in the country continues to rise. The southern city of Sabha has represented a growing COVID-19 hotspot, as almost half the cases in Libya have been reported there. The country's borders, schools, and mosques remain closed, and large public gatherings remain prohibited. Though lockdown measures vary by region, most businesses and public buildings are reportedly still closed. The UN backed, Tripoli-based Government of National Accord (GNA) has extended until at least July 17 an 8:00 PM to 6:00 AM local time curfew in areas under its control. Land and sea border crossing points within GNA territory were closed in mid-March. Schools, mosques, and large public gatherings remain prohibited, though reports indicate that authorities are not strictly enforcing the closures. For its part, the rival eastern-based government reportedly maintains a 7:00 PM to 7:00 AM curfew in areas under its control.

MOROCCO

Though daily incidence of new infections remains low in Morocco (compared to regional neighbors in the Middle East and North Africa) the country has reported rising COVID-19 cases since June 18. Though the country continues its phased deconfinement plan, Morocco extended its state of emergency until August 10, the country's fourth such extension. On July 8, officials announced that land and sea borders, which were previously shuttered on March 15 due to the COVID-19 pandemic, would reopen to Moroccans and foreign residents living in Morocco beginning on July 14. Maritime crossing points were also permitted to reopen from the ports of Sete, France, and Genoa, Italy. The country is only permitting the entry of Moroccan citizens, foreign residents, and family members of citizens and residents. Additionally, 5,000 mosques across the country were permitted to reopen on July 15, excluding Friday prayers, as part of the gradual easing of lockdown measures. Face mask use remains mandatory in public.

OMAN

Oman continues to record jumps in COVID-19 cases, as its curve maintains an upward trajectory. Officials have blamed the spike on lax adherence to social distancing and other health protocols. In response, Omani authorities extended a lockdown on Dhofar Governorate and Masirah Island on July 14, though no date has been set for when the lockdown may be lifted. The Health Ministry stated on

July 14 that citizens and foreign residents would be allowed to fly outside of the country as long as they quarantine upon return, though officials did not specify when flights would resume. All international flights out of Oman were halted on March 29, and foreigners remain prohibited from entering the country until further notice. Regular commercial flights remain suspended.

PAKISTAN

Though Pakistan continues to report thousands of new infections a day, COVID-19 daily case jumps have generally been on a decline since a peak on June 14, suggesting that the country's "smart lockdowns" are at least somewhat effective. On July 9, Pakistan International Airlines (PIA) resumed regular flight operations to the United Arab Emirates (UAE), provided that passengers showed a negative COVID-19 test report taken within 48 hours prior to flight departure. Abu Dhabi-based Etihad Airways resumed flight operations from Pakistan on July 16 after suspending services last month. Also on July 9, the education minister announced that educational institutions across the country are expected to reopen on September 15, provided that the health situation continues to improve, and strict health procedures are expected to be adopted. "Smart lockdowns", which have been enforced in over 200 cities throughout Pakistan, continue to be employed, but vary region to region. The Punjab government extended the smart lockdowns on July 14 through at least July 24. On the other hand, the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa government lifted lockdowns in 89 areas of the province on July 4, following a decrease in reported cases in these hotspots. In affected areas of smart lockdowns, non-essential businesses are shut down and access to the city is prohibited. The Kharlachi border crossing and the Angor Adda border crossing between Pakistan and Afghanistan were reopened for traffic on July 11, and July 10, respectively. Pakistan is also expected to resume its nationwide anti-polio campaign next week, though a specific date has not been provided, following months of suspension due to the coronavirus pandemic.

PALESTINIAN TERRITORIES

Though the rate of infection decreased somewhat in the Palestinian territories over the past seven days, the outbreak in this area continues to spread, with a sharp increase in deaths attributed to the virus recorded in the past two weeks. On July 12, the Palestinian Authority (PA) reimposed a curfew across the West Bank from 8:00 PM to 6:00 AM local time until at least until July 26. Under the new measure, all cities, villages, and refugee camps where COVID-19 cases are reported will be locked down. All gatherings are also banned, and all travel between Hebron, Bethlehem, Ramallah, and Nablus is prohibited.

QATAR

Although Qatar continues to report some of the highest numbers in terms of per capita daily incidence in the world, the nation's rate of infection appears to be decreasing, following a peak on May 30. The second stage of the emirate's four-phase plan to lift anti-virus measures began on July 1, and allowed for the reopening of restaurants, beaches, parks, libraries, and museums, at a limited capacity. The third phase of the reopening plan is set to begin on August 1 and will permit flights from low-risk countries to resume, and shopping malls and markets to reopen. Phase four is expected to occur after September 1, and will include permission to host large gatherings, and the full reopening of theaters, museums, libraries, and cinemas, and allow flights for non-residents to come to Qatar.

SAUDI ARABIA

Daily incidence of COVID-19 remains high in Saudi Arabia, as the kingdom continues to report more than 2,000 new infections every day, though infections have generally been on a decline since July 6. The Saudi government has relaxed most coronavirus restrictions and allowed all economic and commercial activities to resume. The nationwide curfew was lifted on June 21. Remaining restrictions include the suspension of international flights to and from the country, including travel for religious pilgrimages, and the ban of social gatherings of more than 50 people. In a social media post on June 23, the General Directorate of Saudi Passports suggested that Saudi expatriates living abroad will not be able to return to the Kingdom until after the end of the COVID-19 pandemic. No further details were reported. The use of face masks remains mandatory in all public places.

SYRIA

COVID-19 continues to spread in Syria; however, low testing capabilities and poor health infrastructure make it difficult to ascertain the full extent of the outbreak in the nation, though speculation is widespread that infections are higher than official data suggests. Additionally, on July 9, a health official confirmed the first case of COVID-19 in Syria's rebel-held, northwestern Idlib Province, threatening a worsening outbreak as the virus will likely be difficult to control if it reaches the area's displacement camps. The country previously lifted a nightly curfew and a ban on inter-provincial travel. Some public transportation services are said to be operating and shops and malls have been allowed to reopen. Passenger flights into and out of the country remain halted.

TUNISIA

Tunisia's coronavirus curve appears to have flattened, as only a handful of cases are reported each day, notwithstanding a spike in infections on July 13. As of June 11, the government has lifted most of the COVID-19 confinement measures. Face mask use remains mandatory in public spaces. Social distancing and hygiene protocols remain in place, but cafes, restaurants, and mosques have reopened, and travel within the country is allowed. Additionally, limited domestic flights resumed on June 12, and all land, air, and maritime borders reopened on June 27.

TURKEY

Turkey's rate of infection has been steadily declining, albeit slowly, since June 24, suggesting the country may be close to controlling their COVID-19 outbreak. In response to reports that the public is displaying lax attitudes for anti-virus measures, the Interior Ministry has launched mass inspections of commercial shops and public spaces, aimed at bolstering enforcement of anti-virus measures, including social distancing and the mandatory usage of face masks in most urban centers. Turkey has resume limited international flights and reopened land borders with of its neighbors but Iran. Most businesses, restaurants, and public transportation services are operating with restrictions.

UNITED ARAB EMIRATES

Notwithstanding a three-day case spike from July 3-5, daily incidence of new cases in the UAE has been generally declining since mid-May. However, elevated case levels in the past two weeks draw into question whether the UAE's declining COVID-19 curve will be long-lasting or short-lived. Some officials have suggested that Dubai's decision to reopen to tourists on July 7 possibly attributed to recent elevated case numbers. While most movement and traffic restrictions have been lifted, schools and universities are closed for the remainder of the academic year. Sporting events, festivals, religious services, and large gatherings have also been banned. Face mask use remains mandatory in public spaces.

YEMEN

Yemen's coronavirus curve continues to accelerate; however, data collection across the country, and particularly in Houthi-controlled areas, is widely believed to be incomplete and inaccurate. Coupled with poor health infrastructure, this suggests that the actual number of infections is likely much higher than official figures show. Reports that Yemen is currently suffering from a fuel shortage threaten to further worsen the country's humanitarian situation and the spread of COVID-19. Curfews and movement restrictions are reportedly still in place in the Aden, Hadhramaut, and al Mahra governorates, though lockdowns vary by region, and remain subject to change at short notice. Entry by land, sea, and air is currently suspended, with exceptions for humanitarian aid and essential goods.

ASSESSMENT

The coronavirus curve throughout the MENA is likely to continue on an upward trajectory for at least a few weeks, as elevated daily incidences continue to be reported in some countries. Moreover, the actual extent of the outbreak could be much higher than current data suggests, as some countries continue to deal with inadequate testing capabilities, and a few, including Yemen and Libya, are widely believed to be underreporting cases.

Despite case tallies continuing to rise, regionally, the overall trend continues toward a relaxation of restrictions. Many nations have made concerted efforts to resume domestic travel, and recent weeks have also shown an increase in international travel, as well as the reopening of land border crossings for passenger traffic and trade. Several governments have expressed the intention of lifting remaining movement and security restrictions with the conclusion of Eid al Adha at the beginning of August. While targeted lockdowns have proven to be somewhat effective in areas such as Pakistan, the continued easing of coronavirus restrictions, and resumption of international travel stands to create further vulnerabilities for a resurgence where outbreaks were previously contained. An acceleration of the COVID-19 outbreak across the MENA threatens to overwhelm healthcare systems in vulnerable countries, as sources have reported that healthcare systems in parts of Egypt, Pakistan, Iraq, and Iran have reached capacity, and Yemen's healthcare system is on the brink of collapse.

Still, most governments seem apprehensive to reinstate blanket lockdown measures, as officials have typically cited the mounting financial hardships afflicting their constituents as the reason for lifting anti-virus measures. Moreover, in areas such as Israel and the West Bank, where partial lockdowns have

been reinstated following a surge in infections, increasing public fatigue coupled with worsening economic situations are likely to lead to social unrest. Indeed, Israel has become a focal point in the MENA, as its growing outbreak has fueled anti-government protests, which have occasionally turned violent. Israel's current socioeconomic conditions exemplify how the coronavirus pandemic has led to worsening security situations in some countries. With financial situations unlikely to improve significantly in the near future despite the resumption of some commercial and social activities, socioeconomic grievances are likely to persist and lead to demonstrations that could grow in size and scope.

About the Author

Carolyn Pucillo joined the Risk Intelligence Monitoring Center (RIMC) team in September 2018. During her tenure, Carolyn has held several analyst positions, serving in her current role as regional analyst for the Middle East and North Africa since June 2020.

She holds a Bachelor of Arts degree in International Studies from The Ohio State University, with a concentration in Security & Intelligence. Carolyn has also studied at the Princess Sumaya University for Technology in Amman, Jordan. With extensive experience abroad, she speaks proficient Arabic and Italian.

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