

This report was produced by OCHA Iraq in collaboration with humanitarian partners.

KEY MESSAGES

- 154 confirmed cases of COVID-19 in Iraq as of 17 March 2020
- 11 fatalities confirmed due to COVID-19 as of 12 March 2020
- 41 patients who have recovered from the virus
- All flights to Iraqi airports suspended until 24 March 2020
- “Curfews” in Baghdad, Erbil and elsewhere
- Movement restrictions in place between governorates
- Ministry of Health bans large religious gatherings
- WHO high-level technical mission concluded

SITUATION OVERVIEW

As of 17 March 2020, the Iraqi Ministry of Health has confirmed 154 cases of COVID-19 in Iraq; 11 fatalities; and 41 patients who have recovered from the virus. Approximately one-quarter of the cases have been recorded in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI) and the remainder have been recorded in the provinces of federal Iraq.

Both the Government of Iraq (GOI) and the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) have instituted strict movement restrictions to try to further stem any transmission of the virus. All airports in Iraq will suspend operations (incoming and outgoing flights) for a one-week period between 17-March and 24-March. Prior to the suspension of operations, there were constantly evolving prohibitions in both Baghdad and Erbil on the entry of citizens holding certain nationalities, or whom had traveled to certain countries in Europe and Asia prior to arriving in Iraq. In some instances, those who did not abide by or were not aware of the latest restrictions were returned to their destination of origin or placed into mandatory 14-day quarantine.

The KRG imposed a “curfew” in the cities of Erbil and Sulaymaniyah for a 48-hour period beginning on 14-March which was subsequently extended for an additional 48-hour period. It is currently slated to end at midnight on the evening of 18-March. The possibility of additional extensions exists. (These movement restrictions are being translated in English as “curfews,” but are essentially a full prohibition of all non-essential movement for a multiple-day period, as opposed to a requirement that citizens be home by a certain time.) In federal Iraq, the Government instituted a week-long “curfew” in Baghdad from 17-March until 24-March. Citizens are requested to stay home except in the case of emergencies. In all locales, security, health workers, journalists, diplomats, and United Nations personnel are exempted, and the commercial movement of goods continues. Similar “curfews” are being instituted fully or partially in other governorates; similar exemptions apply. Both KRG and GOI have suspended travel between governorates during these periods.

A high-level technical mission from the World Health Organization (WHO) recently concluded a visit to Iraq to support the Iraqi Ministry of Health response to COVID-19 prevention and containment measures. The mission, comprised of experts from the Regional Office for the Eastern Mediterranean Region and headquarters in Geneva, held a series of meetings with national health authorities and gave guidance on strengthening response and control measures. WHO has provided the Ministry of Health at both central and regional levels with sufficient supplies of laboratory test kits and personal protective equipment to allow for a quick response to severe cases. In addition, WHO is working to establish three negative-pressure rooms in Baghdad, Erbil and Basra to accommodate patients who might require more sophisticated medical treatment.

The Iraqi Ministry of Health has banned all major religious gatherings during the Islamic month of Rajab (February 25 - March 24).



Map Sources: ESRI, UNCS.
The boundaries and names shown and the designations used on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by the United Nations. Map created in Sep 2013.

IMPACT ON HUMANITARIAN OPERATIONS

International staff from the United Nations, international organizations, and NGOs are impacted by the suspension of flights and prohibitions on the entry of personnel with certain nationalities. Remote working modalities have been implemented wherever possible, but some programming continuity will be temporarily disrupted. Humanitarian actors have been assured that they are exempted from the movement restrictions imposed in KRI, Baghdad and between governorates, but the operational implications of these movement restrictions are still being evaluated. Activities related to COVID-19 preparedness, mitigation and response are being prioritized, however, other critical services are ongoing wherever possible. Solutions are being sought for unintended complications due to the “curfews” such as the closure of banks leading to an inability of partners to access currency for cash-based-transfers to beneficiaries.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION ON COVID-19

General information:

- <https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019>

World Health Organization Situation Reports:

- <https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019/situation-reports/>

Global dashboard tracking COVID-19 cases:

- <https://who.maps.arcgis.com/apps/opsdashboard/index.html#/bda7594740fd40299423467b48e9ecf6>

Iraq National Plan for Health Security (April 2019):

- <http://www.emro.who.int/irq/iraq-news/ministry-of-health-and-who-mobilize-national-authorities-to-facilitate-implementation-of-core-public-health-capacities-under-the-international-health-regulations.html>

Latest available information on travel restrictions (IATA):

- <https://www.iatatravelcentre.com/international-travel-document-news/1580226297.htm>

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