

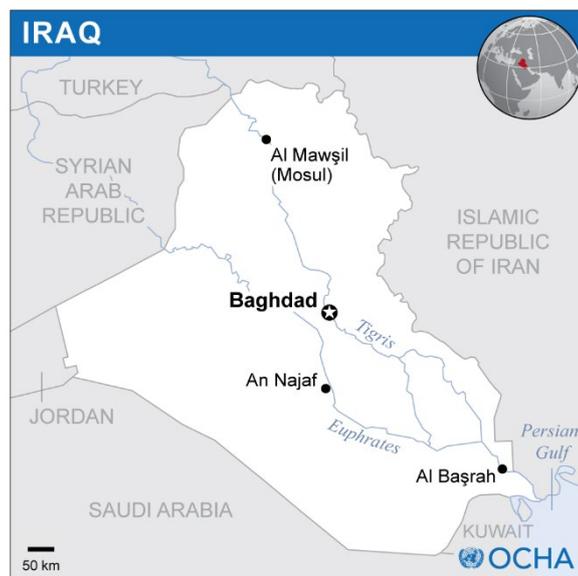
This report was produced by OCHA Iraq in collaboration with humanitarian partners.

KEY MESSAGES

- 13 confirmed cases of COVID-19 in Iraq as of 29 February 2020
- 6 in Baghdad; 5 in Kirkuk; 1 in Najaf; 1 in Babil
- No cases yet recorded in Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI)
- Iraqi Ministry of Interior orders suspension of work of several government ministries, departments and committees to halt spread of COVID-19
- Reports of smuggling from Iran into KRI to avoid quarantine
- Turkish Airlines temporarily halts flights to Iraq and KRI

SITUATION OVERVIEW

The first recorded case of COVID-19 (also colloquially known as “coronavirus”) was recorded in Iraq on 24-February, in the city of Najaf. Since then, 12 more cases have been confirmed: six in Baghdad, five in Kirkuk, and one in Babil. There have not yet been any fatalities in Iraq linked to COVID-19. There have not yet been any cases recorded in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI). Four suspected cases in Ninewa and Najaf tested negative and the patients were discharged from quarantine. There are constant reports on social media of suspected cases, but OCHA is reporting only on those cases confirmed by the World Health Organization (WHO), who are working in close collaboration with health officials in the Government of Iraq and the KRI.



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.

All of the earliest confirmed cases were linked to patients who had recently traveled to or returned from Iran. The source of infection for the most recent confirmed cases have not always been conclusively reported, but COVID-19 infections in Iran to rise. As of 29 February 2020, there were 593 confirmed cases in Iran and 43 fatalities. Iraqi citizens returning to KRI and Iraq from Iran are required to undergo a 14-day mandatory quarantine, but security actors in KRI are warning of reports that some people are seeking to be smuggled across the border in order to avoid the two-week isolation period. Iraq’s border with Iran remains closed, and travel restrictions remain in place for eight other countries (see [Situation Report No.1](#)).

The Iraqi Minister of the Interior has ordered the temporary suspension of work of several government ministries, departments and committees as a mitigating measure to halt the spread of the virus. Foreign oil workers who had previously left the country are currently barred from re-entry. Screening of passengers is underway at all airports, and also in several neighboring countries. The Semelka border crossing between KRI and north-east Syria has been closed except for “emergency cases.” It is not clear yet what impact travel restrictions may have on asylum seekers crossing into KRI from Syria. The Minister of Health for Turkey announced on 29 February that passenger flights originating in Turkey would be temporarily suspended to China, Iran, Iraq, South Korea and Italy. Turkish Airlines accounts for a large proportion of international travel into/out of Iraq and KRI; it is not clear yet what operational impact this will have on the United Nations and its humanitarian partners. Saudi Arabia has temporarily suspended Umrah pilgrimages, and announced that travelers from countries affected by COVID-19 will be denied entry at the border.

WHO officials continue carrying out briefings throughout the country with all relevant parties, including UN agencies, NGO leadership, government authorities and religious leaders. Schools and universities remain closed throughout Iraq and KRI, and the government has ordered the closures of some public spaces like malls and cafes, although it is not clear how strictly these are enforced. Trepidation about COVID-19 is also impacting ongoing political demonstrations against the government in Baghdad and elsewhere—which are now entering their sixth month—although all reports are anecdotal at present. A COVID-19 emergency cell has been enacted by the Humanitarian Coordinator, and a COVID-19 Working Group has been established by the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI). Increased efforts at coordination are underway.

IMPACT ON HUMANITARIAN OPERATIONS

Humanitarian actors have carried out awareness-raising activities on the prevention and treatment of COVID-19 in IDP camps in Ninewa, Duhok and Sulaymaniyah; additional efforts are underway in other governorates, and further trainings needed in more locations. Increased funding and specialized equipment to support these efforts are required. The crowded conditions and outdated infrastructure in many camps mean that the virus could potentially spread easily if introduced; humanitarian partners are working to prevent this, and ensure that staff has the capacity necessary to address any health emergencies that arise. Prospective treatment centers are being established throughout the country, and technical guidance is being disseminated by the WHO and Health Cluster partners. However, humanitarian partners continue to be negatively impacted access restrictions in place since November 2019 when the previously agreed-upon governmental access authorization regime for NGOs was discontinued in the wake of political disruptions caused by anti-government protests. The office of the Humanitarian Coordinator and OCHA have been working for months with government counterparts to find an alternative, but none has been agreed upon as yet. These access restrictions affect how quickly partners can reach IDPs and other beneficiaries. In parallel, movement restrictions related to COVID-19 at the individual governorate level (see [Situation Report No.1](#)) are impacting humanitarian activity. Some humanitarian agencies are also taking individual decisions to cancel missions based on the operational realities presented (sometimes due only to rumors of suspected cases presented on social media). Contingency and preparedness planning is underway. Coordination efforts are taking place throughout the country. Several briefings at the provincial level were planned for Sunday, 1-March.

Additional closures are likely to be announced in coming days. Additional cancelled missions and movement restrictions should be expected.

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/>

WHO global dashboard tracking COVID-19 cases:

- <https://experience.arcgis.com/experience/685d0ace521648f8a5beeeee1b9125cd>

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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