

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

### KEY MESSAGES

- 36 confirmed cases of COVID-19 in Iraq as of 5 March 2020
- First two fatalities recorded, both in Baghdad; third COVID-19-related fatality suspected
- Five cases now recorded in Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI)
- All cases in Iraq believed to be linked to travellers coming from Iran, or those with close contact to travellers from Iran
- Health screening points established at border points between KRI and Federal Iraq
- World Health Organization has discussed preventative measures with religious authorities in Najaf
- Friday prayers cancelled
- \$15 million allocation from CERF released to help contain spread



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.

### 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, 35 more cases have been confirmed, both in federal Iraq and the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI). All five cases in KRI are in Sulaymaniyah governorate. Two fatalities—as well as a third fatality suspected to be linked to COVID-19—have been recorded. All of the fatalities were older people who had existing health frailties.

The World Health Organization (WHO) has stated that all confirmed cases were linked to patients who had recently traveled to or returned from Iran, or people who had been in close contact with carriers of the virus. COVID-19 infections in Iran continue to rise. As of 5 March 2020, there were 2922 confirmed cases and 92 fatalities. Travel restrictions continue to be maintained on nationals of or travelers from Iran and eight other countries, in both federal Iraq and KRI. Duhok authorities have unilaterally restricted the movement of people between Duhok and Turkey; the movement of goods continues. Passenger flights originating in Turkey continue to be suspended from landing in Iraq by the Turkish authorities. However, limited numbers of international carriers continue to service both federal Iraq and KRI. School and universities remain closed, and it is anticipated that authorities will recommend additional suspensions of educational activities.

The Government of Iraq and the Kurdistan Regional Government have both established COVID-19 crisis management committees, with whom WHO is in regular contact. WHO has met with Shia religious authorities in Najaf to seek their assistance in communicating with prospective pilgrims on all preventative measures for COVID-19. The Kurdistan Regional Government has cancelled Friday prayers and large religious gatherings in the region. Friday prayers have also been cancelled at the Imam Hussein shrine in Karbala, the seat of Grand Ayatollah al-Sistani. Health screening points (testing for fever) have been established at border cross points between KRI and federal Iraq, and stricter inspection and movement constraints are anticipated. The Ministry of Health has issued broad directives to the government not to hold or attend large meetings or conferences over the coming two months.

The Ministry of Migration and Displacement and humanitarian actors have distributed hygiene kits at IDP camps, and awareness-raising campaigns and preventative activities are ongoing both in camps and in some out-of-camp IDP sites. WHO is working with government authorities to build advanced health facilities, such as isolation chambers, that can be used in the treatment of COVID-19 patients. The UN Emergency Relief Coordinator has released US\$15 million from the Central Emergency Response Fund to help finance efforts to stop the spread of the virus in Iraq and elsewhere. The money has been released to WHO and UNICEF, the UN agency that oversees WASH (water, sanitation and hygiene) efforts.

## IMPACT ON HUMANITARIAN OPERATIONS

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Humanitarian actors continue to report the detrimental impact of COVID-19 on operations in Iraq. In addition to existing access constraints that are affecting a majority of humanitarian NGOs, movement restrictions and health screenings are causing additional interruptions to normal operating procedures. Mandatory temperature screenings at border crossings between KRI and federal Iraq are contributing to long delays for partners entering Ninewa governorate from Erbil. Some planned distributions of basic NFI kits have been postponed until further notice; mine awareness activities have been suspended; group-based psychosocial support services for children have been deferred. OCHA has requested that clusters identify priority activities in four categories judged to be as critical to be carried out in the current operating environment, giving particular consideration to limiting risk of exposure/transmission, and restrictions placed on public gatherings/movements. The categories are: (1) life-saving activities; (2) sensitive protection activities; (3) awareness raising and hygiene promotion; (4) emergency logistics/transport.

## ADDITIONAL INFORMATION ON COVID-19

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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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