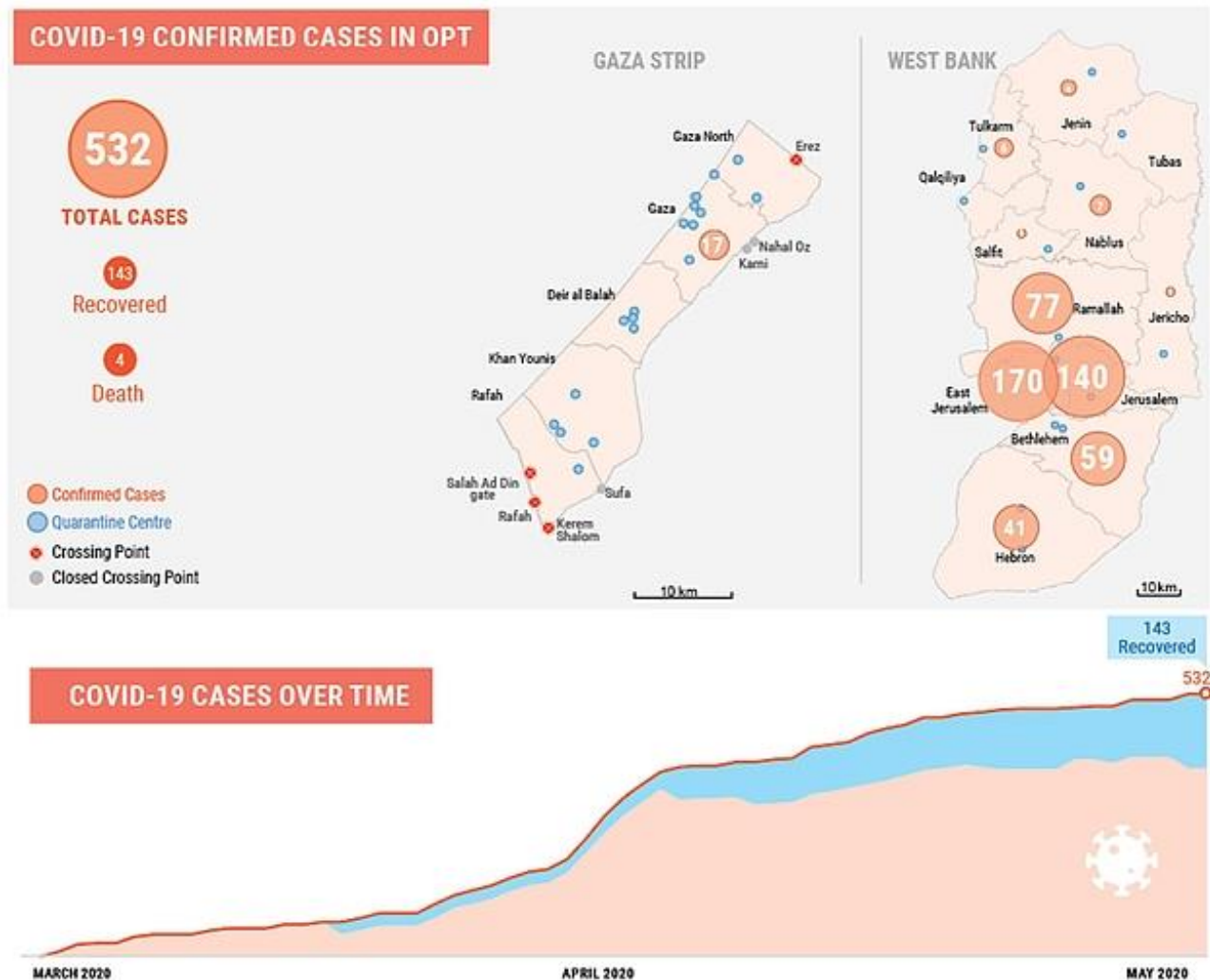


COVID-19 Emergency Situation Report 7 (28 April – 4 May 2020)

Highlights

- 25 new COVID-19 cases in the West Bank, most in East Jerusalem; no new cases in Gaza.
- Decline reported in public compliance with restrictions and guidelines throughout oPt.
- Revised Inter-Agency Response Plan for COVID-19 crisis is 33 per cent funded.



Situation Overview

As of 4 May, some 532 Palestinians are confirmed to have contracted COVID-19 in the oPt, including 170 in East Jerusalem,^[1] 345 in the remainder of the West Bank and 17 in the Gaza Strip. This is an increase of 25 compared to last week, with at least 103 recovered and no new deaths recorded.

According to the Palestinian Ministry of Health (MoH), since the onset of the pandemic, nearly 34,000 laboratory samples have been tested and approximately 14,800 Palestinians are in quarantine at home, or in designated facilities for monitoring purposes. Addressing the critical gaps in supplies needed to contain and manage the pandemic remains the main priority of the Ministry of Health (MoH) and the humanitarian community. The main items required include testing kits, personal protective equipment (PPE),

ventilators and essential Intensive Care Unit (ICU) equipment. These gaps are the result of the fragile situation of the Palestinian health system, even before the crisis, exacerbated by global shortages since then.

On 4 May, President Abbas extended for an additional month, the State of Emergency which had originally been declared on 5 March across the oPt, and then continued until 3 May. Noting that “a large share of the population was already vulnerable even before the current outbreak”, the World Bank has estimated that Palestinian economy will shrink in 2020 between 2.6 to 7.6 per cent compared to 2019, depending on the length of restrictions.

West Bank

Concurrent with the relaxation measures announced two weeks ago, with factories, workshops and certain shops reopening, subject to restricted opening times and labour force participation, the Palestinian Authority has imposed a daily curfew from 19.00 until early the following morning since the beginning of Ramadan. Schools, wedding halls, cafes, mosques, sport clubs and resorts remain closed. However, there are increasing reports that public compliance is flagging, with increasing calls for an end to the lockdown on social media, and reports of people venturing in public without the obligatory protective masks. On 3 May, clashes were recorded in Hebron between street vendors and PA security forces, trying to impose regulations.

Following agreement between the Palestinian and Israeli authorities, over ten thousand Palestinian labourers crossed into Israel from the West Bank on 3 May. They are part of an estimated 40,000 labourers who have been granted permits to stay in Israel until the end of Ramadan. As part of the agreement, Israeli employers will be responsible for the accommodation of their workers, while the Israeli authorities will provide workers with health insurance, as well as protective masks and gloves. Of concern is the expected mass return of the labourers to the West Bank for the Eid Al Fitr holiday, estimated to start on 23 May, due to the limited capacity of the Palestinian authorities to register, monitor and control the intake. The unregulated movement of workers back and forth also reportedly continues on a significant scale on a daily basis, due to the multiple openings in the West Bank Barrier.

Access of farmers to their lands in the closed area behind the Barrier (the ‘Seam Zone’) remains heavily restricted, due to the revocation of permits and the non-opening of agricultural gates. According to WHO, three Palestinian Bedouin communities in the ‘Seam Zone’ in the Qalqiliya governorate have been without basic primary healthcare services since the beginning of April, as mobile health services have been unable to gain the necessary Israeli-issued permits to access the area.

In East Jerusalem, COVID-19 cases continue to be managed by the East Jerusalem Hospital Network and Israeli hospitals. By the end of the reporting period, there were three Palestinians with COVID-19 at St. Joseph’s Hospital and another three at Hadassah Hospital. Eight health workers who hold West Bank ID cards have contracted the virus at Augusta Victoria Hospital; seven are being quarantined in PA centres in the West Bank and one in the hospital itself. Access of Palestinians holding West Bank IDs to East Jerusalem hospitals remains severely restricted, with only emergency cases and cancer patients granted permits.

While on 3 May the Israeli authorities reopened schools for students from 1st to 3rd, and 11th and 12th grades, the Palestinian Parents Committee in East Jerusalem has

announced that it will not allow students to return, citing the lack of measures to ensure physical distancing in already overcrowded classrooms. An exception is being made for the 12th grade exam, the Tawjihi, which will take place from 30 May onwards.

Citing the lack of building permits, the Israeli authorities demolished or seized another nine Palestinian-owned, livelihood-related structures in Area C of the West Bank. The Humanitarian Coordinator, Jamie McGoldrick, has called on the Israeli authorities to stop demolitions, particularly during the COVID-19 crisis and the month of Ramadan. Also of concern is the continued rise in settler violence during the crisis, with ongoing attacks by Israeli settlers, reports of land levelling, vandalism against Palestinian vehicles and olive trees, and physical attacks on Palestinian farmers during the reporting period.

King Hussein/Allenby crossing opened on 3 May to allow an estimated 2,000 Palestinians to return from Jordan. The daily passage will be limited to 500 people per day to allow for the testing of all returnees in Jericho, before they go into home quarantine.

Gaza Strip

During the reporting period, 716 new samples were taken in Gaza, raising the total number sampled since the start of the pandemic to 5,143, with no new cases detected. Only five of the 17 people confirmed with COVID-19 are still carrying the virus. Approximately 1,800 people, who in recent weeks have entered Gaza from Egypt and Israel, are quarantined in 19 centres. Between 4 and 7 May, over 1,600 people are expected to be released after finishing 21 days of mandatory quarantine.

On 27 April, the Hamas authorities authorized the reopening of restaurants that provides in-door service, across Gaza, subject to the abidance of certain hygiene and physical distancing measures, while schools, mosques, wedding halls and other public spaces remain closed, and the ban on public gatherings continues. However, as in the West Bank, a decline in public observance of regulations is reported, especially before the Iftar, the evening meal which concludes the daily fast in Ramadan. WHO is encouraging people to adhere to the recommended measures, including physical distancing and personal hygiene measures. In cooperation with UNICEF, WHO continues efforts to procure essential ICU and ventilator equipment through global supply mechanisms.

On 2 April, postal banks started to disburse monthly payments to 100,000 vulnerable families, as part of the non-COVID-related Government of Qatar assistance to Gaza, with appropriate physical distancing measures applied at all bank branches.

The Rafah Crossing with Egypt remained closed in both directions. According to local authorities, the crossing is expected to open in one or two weeks to allow for the return of up to 2,000 Palestinians who are currently in Egypt, who will be quarantined for 21 days. In addition, another 180 Palestinians currently in Jordan are expected to return to Gaza through the Erez Crossing next week. The movement of goods from Israel and Egypt has continued as previously, including the entry of restricted ("dual use") items via the Israeli-controlled Kerem Shalom Crossing.