

December 2020

Dear colleagues,

As 2020 draws to a close we reflect on a difficult year that has brought many challenges. Our six regional infectious disease surveillance networks have helped lead the pandemic response in multiple ways including advising governments and shaping policy, researching the effects of the disease, hosting public health awareness webinars, delivering solutions to the problem of cross-border infection, using lessons learnt from seasonal influenza to respond to Covid-19, sharing successful response plans with other countries and working to strengthen capacity at points of entry.

With the hope of a variety of efficacious vaccines on the horizon we look forward to a brighter 2021 and as CORDS, we want to reaffirm our commitment for a World United Against Infectious Diseases. The contributions of each and every one of you is much appreciated.

With best wishes for a happy and healthy new year,
Marlo Libel, Senior Adviser, Ending Pandemics.

Regional responses to the Covid-19 pandemic

Cambodia: COVID-19

- As of 15 September, 275 COVID-19 laboratory confirmed cases; 237 cases acquired overseas
- Only two confirmed cases since 13 August
- All cases since 11 April (n=153) have been imported or linked directly to importation
- Focus remains on health response through early detection, isolation, treatment, investigation, contact tracing and management of contacts
- Preparedness efforts are being ramped up so that health care services can respond should there be a surge in cases

Cumulative (as of 15 Sep)	
Confirmed	: 275
Deaths	: 0
Contacts traced (13 Sep)	
Total number	: 4,666
High risk	: 72
Provinces (with Phnom Penh)	
Total number	: 13
Laboratory Tests Conducted (13 Sep)	
Total tests	: 108,738

Note: A video inset shows Dr. Ly Sovann, MBDS Board member and Director of the CDC Department at the Ministry of Health, Cambodia, presenting the webinar on 18 September 2020.

All of the countries in the Asia Partnership on Emerging Infectious Diseases Research (**APEIR**) region are still fighting the Covid-19 pandemic. Since the early stages of the pandemic the countries of the region have been using various strategies to try and prevent the spread. Most of the countries in the region have been recognized for their successful response. Cambodia, Vietnam, and Thailand are successfully managing the virus and have largely avoided local transmission through their strong health security systems (see MBDS table below for data). Their experience of managing previous pandemics has had a significant impact on their Covid-19 response as well as strong leadership, adopting both a proactive and responsive approach and multi sectoral collaborations. China is also considered a country that had a quick and effective response with very low levels of disease currently. Lao PDR has seen very few cases and Indonesia is trying its best to tackle the virus with cases still on the rise in the country.

The East African Integrated Disease Surveillance Network (**EAIDSNet**) has purchased Covid-19 supplies and testing kits for countries in the region, including a biosafety cabinet for South Sudan for use in their testing laboratories. Dr Michael Katende, the East African Community Health Officer, officiated at the equipment handover for Kenya and Uganda. Arrangements for handover in Burundi, South Sudan and Tanzania are underway. The Covid-19 situation in Kenya and Uganda is deteriorating. As of 8 December 2020, there have been 89,100 confirmed cases in Kenya, approximately 300 to 800 a day and 1,545 deaths, with a case fatality rate of 1.7%. In Uganda there have been 23,200 cases, approximately 200 to 400 cases a day and 207 deaths with a case mortality rate of 0.90%. In the other countries in the region the situation remains relatively stable.

The countries in the Mekong Basin Disease Surveillance Foundation (**MBDS**) region as stated above, continue to work very hard to contain the Covid-19 pandemic and to prepare for the possibility of a second wave. The table below shows the latest Covid-19 statistics in the region (as of 8 December 2020). On 18 September 2020, Dr. Ly Sovann, MBDS Board member and Director of the CDC Department at the Ministry of Health, Cambodia, presented a webinar on Cambodia's Covid-19 situation and experiences as part of the EU Chemical, Biological, Radiological and Nuclear Risk Mitigation Centres of Excellence (EU CBRN COE) South East Asia Covid-19 webinar series.

Country	Total Cases	Active Cases	Critical	Recovered	Deaths
Cambodia	350	43	-	307	-
China	86,646	280	6	81,732	4,634
Lao PDR	41	13	-	28	-
Myanmar	101,739	18,862	-	80,726	2,151
Thailand	4,126	192	1	3,874	60
Vietnam	1,377	118	-	1,224	35

Source: <https://www.worldometers.info/coronavirus/>

The Southeast European Center for Surveillance and Control of Infectious Diseases (**SECID**) is continuing its work with CDC Atlanta, with supplemental Covid-19 funding for all the countries in the region to support their virology reference laboratories, as well as its ongoing project with seven of the region's countries on avian, pandemic and seasonal influenza surveillance and response. Covid-19 cases in the region continue to rise with the winter season ahead. As of the end of November, Serbia was among Europe's top three countries for infection rates per 100,000 people. In Albania, there was an average of 500-800 cases a day and a rise in the number of deaths. Bosnia-Herzegovina is one of the hardest-hit countries in the Balkans. In Bulgaria, the number of new positive cases remains high and on 23 November the Health Minister proposed a lockdown to slow the spread. On 20 November, North Macedonia's Government declared a state of emergency.

Country	Total tests	Total cases	Daily tests	Positive cases	Total Deaths
Albania	204,104	44,436	2,532	753	936
Bosnia and Herzegovina	443,407	96,021	3,596	1,077	3,081
Bulgaria	1,032,782	168,165	9,715	3,980	5,156
Croatia	825,023	154,852	8,782	2,613	2,298
Greece	2,504,704	118,045	19,438	1,324	3,194
Kosovo*	155,625	43,881	1,541	557	1,137
Moldova	488,184	119,204	3,792	1,709	2,460
Montenegro	146,586	39,153	2,086	591	549
North Macedonia	352,735	69,452	2,993	1,120	1,977
Romania	4,293,672	524,675	29,400	7,439	12,660
Serbia	1,936,157	234,027	20,514	7,818	2,062
Slovenia	563,795	87,936	6,158	1,648	1,862

* This designation is without prejudice to positions on status and is in line with UNSCR 1244/1999 and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo declaration of independence.

Sources: National Ministries of Health and Institutes of Public Health - data from 8 December 2020.

Over the past two months, the Covid-19 situation in the Middle East Consortium on Infectious Disease Surveillance (MECIDS) region has been mixed with cases dropping in Israel but rising in Jordan where they have a lockdown at weekends and Palestine where there is an evening and weekend lockdown and a shortage of testing kits. The network recently held a board meeting where partners exchanged their experiences of the Covid-19 pandemic and they are preparing for their next set of Covid-19 webinars for health professionals and laboratory personnel as part of a grant from the EU. The topics will be based around clinical testing and will be held virtually across the three countries in the region. An article on the excellent work of the network on cross-border cooperation on infectious diseases was published in the British Medical Journal on 13 November (see article below).

MECIDS runs Covid-19 public health campaign



The Middle East Consortium on Infectious Disease Surveillance (MECIDS) have used Covid-19 funding from the Rockefeller Brothers Foundation for a media campaign in Palestine and a series of webinars and lectures to raise awareness of the pandemic. In April 2020, MECIDS held a virtual board meeting to determine a project work plan and to develop a media campaign in coordination with the Ma'an News Agency and Palestinian public health officials. It was agreed that the campaign would follow WHO guidelines with additional local directives set by the Palestinian and Israeli Ministries of Health.

MECIDS designed, developed and produced a total of 13 videos featuring interviews and public service announcements by local health experts and leaders. The videos were broadcast at least ten times a day on Ma'an News Network. The videos covered important Covid-19 preventive measures and received wide viewership. The key messages included: hand washing as a means of preventing Covid-19, the importance of utilizing personal protective equipment and social distancing and symptoms to look out for. There was also an interview with a Palestinian public health official explaining the value of lockdowns. The media campaign reached a large audience in Jerusalem, the West Bank and Gaza. The videos were streamed across the Ma'an Network's Facebook page and social media sites. As a result, each video received at least 35,000 views.

To view the videos, visit:

<http://www.mecidsnetwork.org/content/multimedia>

The webinar series included a collaboration between MECIDS and the School of Public Health, Tel Aviv University, where nine webinars were held in Israel with links shared with Palestinian college students. The topic was 'Coronavirus disease:

epidemiological and clinical aspects and implications for prevention and control' with the aim to raise awareness and knowledge of Covid-19 and of the transmission routes to prevent the spread of infection. The program included five lectures for middle and high school students, three lectures for teachers and parents and one for graduate Arab students at Tel Aviv University. There were approximately 50 – 100 attendees at each lecture and 1,800 views of the lecture at the University. The Jordanian Ministry of Health implemented two training workshops on Covid-19 in September 2020, held at the Ministry of Health, aiming to raise awareness among healthcare workers on surveillance, reporting and infection prevention control. Fifteen participants attended each session. Feedback on the webinar series was very positive with a large take up across target audiences.

For more information on the work of MECIDS visit:

<http://www.mecidsnetwork.org/>

Indonesian Covid-19 Stigma Study



From May to August 2020, officers from the Asia Partnership on Emerging Infectious Diseases Research ([APEIR](#)) participated in a study conducted by Dr. Sudeepa Abeysinghe at the University of Edinburgh in collaboration with the Indonesian One Health University Network (INDOHUN) and Dr Ismail Fahmi, Media Kernels Indonesia. The research asked, 'What public narratives of risk and threat underpin the stigmatization of health workers in Indonesia, and how can policy and communication strategies mitigate this stigmatization?'

The project consisted of three components: an analysis of policy and evidence around stigma-mitigation, an analysis of Twitter discussions that exacerbate the stigmatisation of health workers and a qualitative investigation of lay discourses of risky places and peoples, to investigate the public understanding of risk that forms the basis for health worker-directed stigma. The qualitative study was a five-week research project conducted in Jakarta and the Greater Jakarta area (Bogor, Bekasi, Tangerang, and Depok), Indonesia, that examined stigmatization as a barrier to public health. As part of this, a diverse group of participants was selected to understand the participant's experiences and narratives of Covid-19 using a weekly digital diaries method.

Interviewees expressed concern around government messaging, and as a result came up with their own individual explanations of risk and the way in which Covid-19 is transmitted. These explanations often focused on their perceptions of the risk arising from the activities of other members of society or other social groups. In particular, the study proposes that people tended to see themselves as protected in social situations through their knowledge of the disease. This work adds to the literature on the social perception of infectious disease in urban Indonesia, an area that has been understudied to date. The study demonstrates the importance of social context for risk perception and reflects on the differences between the understanding of the lay person versus that of the public health professional for Covid-19 risk.

For more information on the work of APEIR visit:

www.apeir.net

For more information on the project visit:

<https://ghpu.sps.ed.ac.uk/social-contagion-stigma-indonesia-covid-19/>

SECID works in partnership to prevent infectious diseases

The Southeast European Center for Surveillance and Control of Infectious Diseases (**SECID**) is partnering with The Partnership for Influenza Vaccine Introduction (PIVI), a key program of the Task Force for Global Health for the fifth year. An innovative public/private program, PIVI works in partnership with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), Ministries of Health and corporate partners to create sustainable seasonal influenza vaccination programs in low and middle-income countries. PIVI works in concert with WHO programs to help countries prepare for pandemic influenza and to support countries' efforts to control and prevent seasonal influenza.

This important work, ultimately be supported by a country's Ministry of Health or Institutes of Public Health, builds the immunization infrastructure, capacity and vaccine delivery systems critical for future influenza pandemics and other infectious disease epidemics. PIVI provides technical assistance and readiness assessment helping to build sustainable programs. This work also includes strengthening capacity for evidence-based vaccine policy decision making by National Immunization Technical Advisory Groups (NITAG). To date, PIVI has provided more than 4.2 million doses of flu vaccine and/or technical assistance to Ministries of Health over the world including in Albania and North Macedonia.

SECID is developing a One Health Platform

Building on the Information System of Infectious Diseases (SISI), in Albania, SECID is expanding the system to enable One Health surveillance. The goal is to develop a One Health platform with multisectoral surveillance data including event-based surveillance data to enable early detection and a coordinated response to disease outbreaks. Priorities include developing ICT solutions to enable smart working between sectors, developing guidelines and protocols to assist the appropriate utilization of the new platform, training of key stakeholders such as public health professionals, veterinarians and community members on the system and sharing the tools and experience to other SECID member countries and to the global CORDS community. The SISI system and the One Health Platforms will be open source for adaptation by other member countries. SISI, is an outcome of an Epihack supported four years ago by Skoll Foundation. SISI was officially handed over and endorsed by the Albanian Public Health Institute in January 2020. In response to the Covid-19 pandemic it has been deployed as the main surveillance tool nationally.

To find out more about the work of SECID visit:

<http://www.secids.com/>

Scaling up cross border cooperation to tackle climate and disease threats

The invaluable work of the Middle East Consortium on Infectious Disease Surveillance (**MECIDS**) has been recognised in an [article](#) in the British Medical Journal (BMJ), 13 November 2020. The BMJ highlighted the expertise of MECIDS in working cooperatively across political borders to detect and prevent infectious diseases.

To read the article in full visit:

<https://www.bmj.com/content/bmj/371/bmj.m3145.full.pdf>

MENA Covid-19 Conference

On 17 November 2020, the inaugural Middle East North Africa (MENA) Covid-19 Conference took place in collaboration with the Israel-Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) Chamber of Commerce and Industry and Netanya Academic College. The Middle East Consortium on Infectious Disease Surveillance (**MECIDS**) were also a key partner. Participants from Israel, Palestine, Jordan, United Arab Emirates and Europe attended virtually to discuss the pandemic's challenges including epidemiological and clinical experiences. The role of technology and the control of chronic diseases such as diabetes and its link to Covid-19 was also highlighted.



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