

## COVID-19 - Coronavirus disease 2019

Country: North Macedonia

First Comprehensive Report – WHO

17 March 2020

Data as reported by authorities by 14:00, 17 March 2020

### SUMMARY

#### Situation update

As of 17 March 2020, a total of 27 COVID-19 cases has been reported in North Macedonia. The first confirmed case reported in the country was on 26 February 2020. All are nationals of North Macedonia.

Of the 27 cases reported, 8 cases are imported, and 18 cases are with local transmission from contact with these travelers and one case remains under epidemiological investigation. 21 of the confirmed cases are from municipality of Debar and 6 are from Skopje and all cases are related to a history of contact with known patient.

All the confirmed cases are in stable condition including a patient under respirator and a 15-year-old boy.

17 of the patients are hospitalized at the Clinic for Infectious Disease and Febrile Conditions in Skopje, 9 are receiving home care in Debar and 1 has recovered and discharged from the Clinic for Infectious Diseases on 16 March 2020.

#### Latest national measures

- ✓ Debar and Centar Zhupa are declared in crisis and these municipalities are under total lock down - 13 March 2020.
- ✓ All border crossings to North Macedonia are closed for foreign nationals, passengers and vehicles except for freight vehicles, diplomatic corps representatives and other persons with special permit – 16 March 2020.
- ✓ The Skopje International Airport shall also be closed except for state, military medical and emergency flights within 48 hours of the entry into force of this Decision. Skopje International Airport closes Wednesday 18 March 2020 afternoon – 16 March 2020.
- ✓ All stores, shopping malls, restaurants, and other public gathering places are closed, except for food stores, supermarkets and pharmacies – business online is encouraged - 13 March 2020.
- ✓ All cafes, bars, clubs, casinos and betting houses are completely closed. All cinema, theatre shows sports events and concerts are cancelled – 13 March 2020.
- ✓ All schools and universities are closed – 13 March 2020
- ✓ Citizens are advised to stay at home and avoid crowds – 14 March 2020.
- ✓ General mobilization of all medical and health staff and mechanical respirators in public and private sectors – 15 March 2020.
- ✓ All employers are encouraged to organize work remotely from home as possible – 15 March 2020.

#### SITUATION IN NUMBERS

total and new cases in the last 24 hours

##### North Macedonia

27 confirmed (8 new cases)

0 deaths

1 recovered

##### Globally

167 511 confirmed (13 903 new)

6606 deaths (862 new)

##### China

81 077 confirmed (29 new)

3218 deaths (14 new)

##### Outside of China

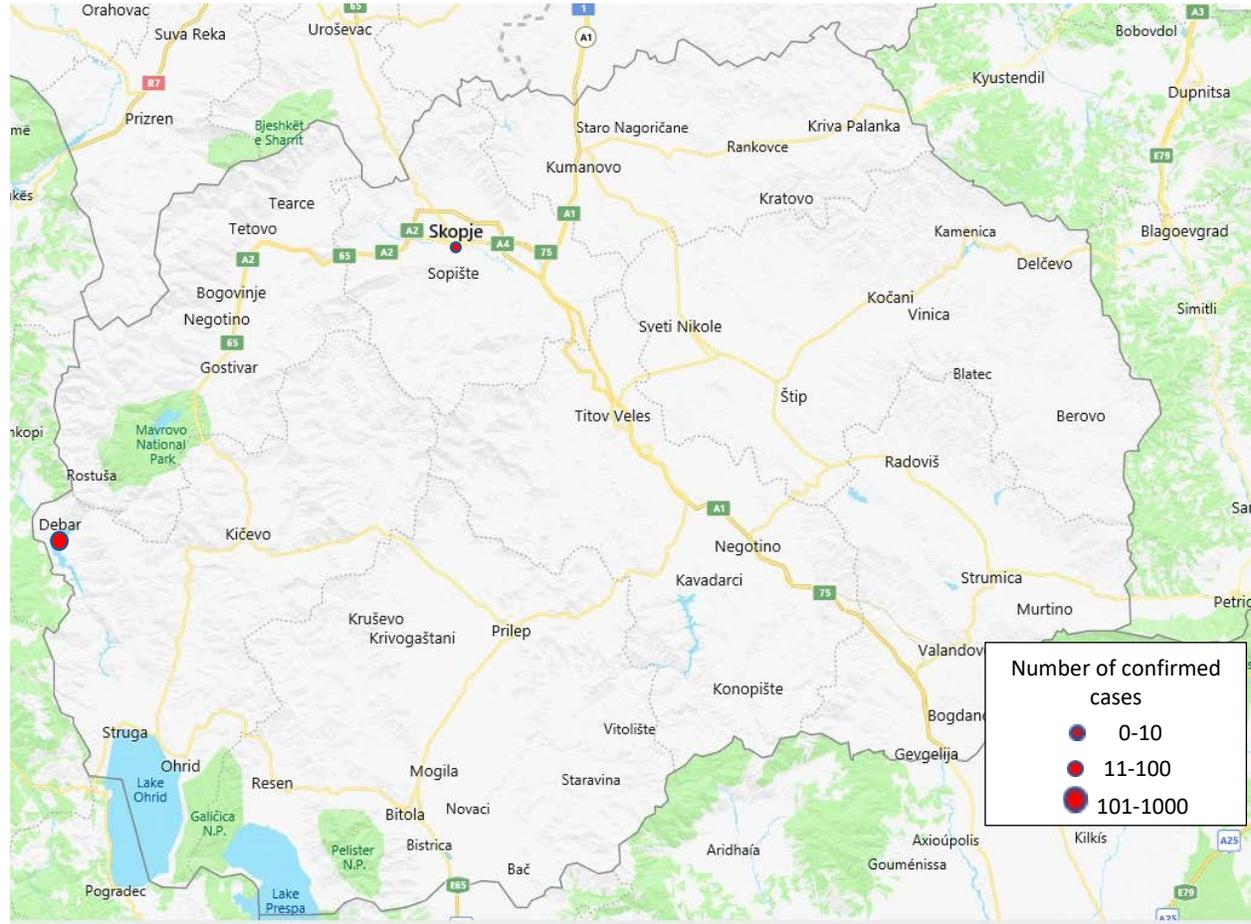
86 434 confirmed (13 874 new)

3388 deaths (848 new)

151 countries/territories/  
areas (4 new)

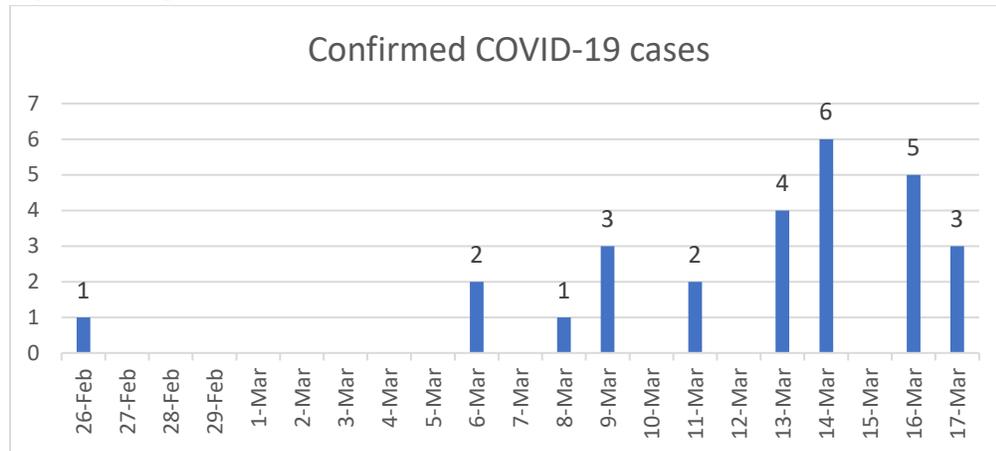
**SURVEILLANCE**

**Figure 1. Municipalities in North Macedonia with reported confirmed cases of COVID-19, 17 March 2020**



<https://experience.arcgis.com/experience/685d0ace521648f8a5beeee1b9125cd>

**Figure 2. Epidemic curve of confirmed COVID-19 cases reported in North Macedonia (n=27), by date of report through 17 March 2020**



## PREPAREDNESS AND RESPONSE

### WHO ROLE AND ACTION

WHO is the lead UN agency for Health and main technical and policy advisor to the government on COVID-19 containment and mitigation strategies for better health system preparedness and response and keeping with the spirit of **Leaving no one behind**.

WHO Globally is informing the public through [daily situation reports](#) and dashboards displaying real-time data: [WHO Health Emergency dashboard](#); [WHO COVID-19 situation dashboard in European Region](#).

**North Macedonia is one of the priority countries for the WHO European Region Emergency Programme and has support directly from WHO Emergency Balkan Hub (based in Belgrade).**

**The objective of WHO action in COVID-19 outbreak in North Macedonia is to limit virus spread, protect health and the health workers at the frontline, preserve the health care system capacity to respond and its sustainability.**

Technical support, guidance and assistance are provided through the WHO Country Office from all levels of the Organization. There is abundance of technical guidance WHO has developed in all areas of work: we are supporting the country to develop technical plans and implement priority actions in the framework of a strong nation-wide strategy.

We are doing the above through:

- **Analyzing Country Planning and response gap: National Pandemic Preparedness Plan is updated and country strategic response plan for the next 3 months and Contingency Plan for COVID – 19** was developed on 14 March 2020 with the IHR team members and the WHO consultant.
- **Preparedness, simulation and evaluation:** WHO in North Macedonia relies on the findings of the **Joint External Evaluation (JEE)** of International Health Regulations (IHR) core capacities, that took place March 2019 <https://www.who.int/ihr/publications/WHO-WHE-CPI-2019.59/en/>. A number of simulation exercises have shown that coordination in the country is good among sectors however some Hospital organization and emergency patients pathways need still to be clarified.
- **Increasing understanding of the disease dynamics in the country:** WHO is constantly analyzing data as we receive it through the **IHR reporting system** and working closely with experts on a range of topics. WHO has proposed a specific study to better understand transmission, risk factors and source of the infection. We have initiated at Western Balkan the study **First Few X cases and contacts (FFX) investigation protocol** for coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19). protocol ([https://www.who.int/publications-detail/the-first-few-x-\(ffx\)-cases-and-contact-investigation-protocol-for-2019-novel-coronavirus-\(2019-ncov\)-infection](https://www.who.int/publications-detail/the-first-few-x-(ffx)-cases-and-contact-investigation-protocol-for-2019-novel-coronavirus-(2019-ncov)-infection)).
- **Increasing capacity of the Institute of Public Health to Early warning, investigations and response and testing;** WHO has enhanced early warning system in the country through real time reporting through the MOH digitalized information system Moj Termin and provision of proper **Laboratory** equipment and supplies of diagnostic Kits and PPEs.
- **Supporting the health emergency management capacities** about best ways to limit the spread of the virus critical preparedness, readiness and response actions for COVID-19, as well as **Providing expert advice continuously updating the country and partners** – including a functional emergency management structure providing continuous and direct technical advice or via consultants.

- **Coordinating with national experts as member of the national infectious diseases committee:** WHO is working with local networks of experts to enhance work on surveillance, epidemiology, early detection, clinical care and treatment, and other ways to identify, manage the disease and limit onward transmission.
- **Clinical management and Infection prevention and control (IPC): Sharing information and training health personnel** on preparedness and response based on real-time knowledge through WHO Open courses and Establishing a pool of coordinated and trained medical teams . The translation to Macedonian language of online WHO trainings for COVID-19 is undertaken <https://openwho.org/>
- **Risk Communication: Keeping the country, partners and the general public informed in real time:** individuals on how to protect themselves and others, including on the safe home care for patients with suspected COVID-19 infection and self-isolation. The advice includes protecting yourself and others, hand cleaning, food safety and mental health. Translation of posters and other promotional materials (all local languages, printed and distributed) including community engagement, and addressing perceptions, risky behaviors, and misinformation. Translation of video materials into local languages and broadcast via all media and social media. Risk Communication training has already taken place April 2019. <http://www.euro.who.int/en/health-topics/health-emergencies/pages/whos-work-in-emergencies/risk-communication-in-emergencies/national-health-emergency-risk-communication-training-package>.
- **Strengthening Points of Entry:** activating Standard Operating Procedures at Skopje International Airport following WHO recommendations.
- **Funds mobilization:** WHO has launched the **COVID-19 Solidarity Response Fund** to enable individuals and organization to contribute to the response. Hosted by the UN Foundation and the Swiss Philanthropy Foundation, funds will be used to coordinate the response, to buy masks, gloves, gowns and goggles for health workers, to buy diagnostic tests, to improve surveillance, and to invest in research and development. <https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019/donate>
- COVID-19 could be regarded as an opportunity to upscale and accelerate the implementation of the **IHR Core Capacities**. Based on the Joint External Evaluation that was carried out in 2019 some areas require immediate strengthening: develop and implement a national IPC program and strategy for healthcare associated infections and strengthen biosafety and biosecurity.

#### WHO IN THE UN COUNTRY TEAM

- WHO leads the **UN Health Group** has provided Continuous support to Coordination meetings with UNCT Health group, provided briefings to EU countries and has established daily contacts with a number of partners to keep them informed. The WR has been actively engaged in conducting sensitization briefings and continuous updating all UN Agencies, Embassies and the UNCT.
- The WHO's risk communication activities have included activation of and contribution to the **UN communication group**.

- **UNCMT:** The UN activated a Crisis Management Team (CMT) on the COVID-19 outbreak in North Macedonia, led by UNRC. The CMT brings together WHO, UNICEF, UNDP, UNFPA, UNWomen, FAO, UNHCR and others UN entities operating in the country.

## COUNTRY RESPONSE

North Macedonia has immediately scaled up its response to detect, trace, prevent, treat, and reduce transmission to save lives. The country has been readying its emergency response system through its IHR core capacity strengthening for the last two years and increasing its capacity to detect and care for patients; the country is working hard now to ensuring its hospitalization surge capacity with necessary personnel in case the outbreak progresses from the clusters we are seeing now to a more community-based transmission.

North Macedonia mobilized an all-of-government action to fight this new coronavirus, including scaling up emergency response mechanisms in all sectors. We have seen recently a positive society response and compliance as well as more trust in the government prevention measures. MOH has started a vigorous risk communication campaign in social media, on TV and other.

It is important to remember that COVID-19 is a totally new virus; and country response is based on lessons learnt only in the past two months from largely affected countries. Actions and readjustments of measures are continuous and monitoring of the situation is ongoing on daily basis.

### All of Government Response

- The Security Council of North Macedonia decided that there is no need to declare emergency or crisis on all the territory of North Macedonia except for the lock down measures in municipalities of Debar and Centar Zhupa – 16 March 2020.
- The President of North Macedonia addressed the citizens for compliance with instructions and for the citizens living abroad to delay their travel back to North Macedonia– 16 March 2020.
- Army of the Republic of North Macedonia (type and number of forces and capacities of the army units, purpose and tasks required and duration of the activity and engagement of the army units), were decided for dealing with any crisis situation – 13 March 2020.
- The Ministry of Health, the Ministry of the Interior, the Ministry of Transport and Communications, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Army of the Republic of North Macedonia, the Crisis Management Center and the Directorate for Protection and Rescue, with all other state institutions concerned to make available all available capacities and resources that can be put in place to manage the situation – 13 March 2020.
- The Steering committee was formed as governmental body for coordination and management within a national crisis management system composed of: Ministers of: Interior, Health, Transport and Communications, Defense, Foreign Affairs and the Head of the Assessment Group are also meeting ad hoc with the Minister of Health and the Operational Committee for decision making on highest level.
- Ministry of Health is coordinating the response through its responsible expert committees:
  1. Infectious diseases commission as a technical expertise to MOH
  2. IHR multisectoral commission
  3. Operational Committee – Task Force for COVID-19

## **Legal**

- Decision to implement punishment recommendations in accordance with Articles 205 and 206 of the Criminal Code for all natural and legal persons that violate the decisions adopted by the State Sanitary and Health Inspectorate and forward the same to the Public Prosecutor's Office of the Republic of North Macedonia for processing so that it can act in accordance within its legally established competences – 12 March 2020.

## **Measures by the Health Insurance Fund – Primary Health care**

The Health Insurance Fund took a series of measures to facilitate the services of its policyholders, to remain in force along the interim measures taken by the government for control of COVID-19 by simplification administrative procedures at primary health care to effectively provide the necessary most needed health services to the patients and to minimize unnecessary contact between GPs and patients, which should only be referred to a doctor when it is really necessary. Accordingly, measures are taken for insurers, family doctors and pharmacies, among others:

- Patients can have consultations and sick leaves (up to 14 days) from Family Physicians by telephone; In the case of need for isolation and substitution of the physician, the Fund will allow without limitation the appointment of a second physician, and if necessary another substitute.
- Family Physicians are given special authority to prescribe for Chronic conditions, rehabilitation prescription and other without referral to specialist. The insurance remains valid beyond the usual 5 years for the duration of the emergency in the country without need for administrative procedures for renewal as of 13 March 2020.

## **Hospitals**

- The government brought a decision to mobilize all medical staff from all public and private hospitals, to be ready to work for COVID-19 – 15 March 2020.
- The University Clinic for Infectious Diseases and Febrile States in Skopje is the designated reference and referral Clinic for care of patients with COVID-19. The Infectious wards from Shtip, Veles and Gostivar and the facility in Demir Kapija are designated as additional institutions for quarantine.
- Children's Hospital Kozle in Skopje has been designated and prepared for COVID-19 if eventual children are infected, and the rest will be transferred to the pediatric clinic to be isolated from COVID-19 patients – 15 March 2020.
- SoPs are adapted as per WHO guidelines for PPE use, case management and testing algorithms.

## **Drugs and Medicine**

- The State Market Inspectorate and the Agency for Drugs and Medical Devices (MALMED) shall carry out coordinated exceptional inspections of all economic operators that are selling products for protection against Coronavirus in order to check if they abide by the measures, recommendations and directions given by the Government – 13 March 2020.

## **Mental Health Support**

- Psychological support is organized by hotline by the University Clinic for Psychiatry – 16 March 2020.

## **Employment**

- Temporary stay at home for all employees with chronic illnesses and pregnant women – 13 March 2020.
- The Government recommends all employers in North Macedonia, i.e. all managers in institutions, depending on the type of work and possibilities, to organize the work of the employees from home, without interrupting the regular functioning of the institution – 15 March 2020.
- The MOH recommended to the textile industry to organize the work process in accordance with the recommendations for the application of preventive measures with appropriate distance between employees.

## **Education**

- All kindergartens, schools and universities are shut until 24 March 2020 – 13 March 2020.
- One parent of children under the age of 10 (or enrolled in the 4<sup>th</sup> grade) is allowed to stay at home to watch the children during the time when the schools are closed – 13 March 2020.
- The Macedonian Radio Television is recommended to allocate time daily for an educational programme intended for pre-school children and primary school students. The Ministry of Education and Science is obliged to prepare an intervention educational programme in the languages included in the educational process and to broadcast it daily and to share educational materials on all social networks and channels – 12 March 2020.

## **Travel**

- Introduction of travel restrictions was gradual starting with closing of some cross border 13 March to all land crossings and all airports on 16 March. The Skopje International Airport shall be closed completely on 18 March 2020, except for state, military medical and emergency flights.
- Citizens of North Macedonia can still enter the country after special request to Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Hotline is in place for that purpose.
- Information for travelers, leaflets and interviews were initially distributed at the airport and interviews and screening at points of entry was practiced to assess high risk situations in addition to the thermal cameras.

## **Mass-gatherings**

- All public and private gatherings are prohibited, regardless of the number of participants – 13 March 2020.

- Faith communities, the Macedonian Orthodox Church, the Catholic Church and the Islamic Religious Community are advised to abide by the social distancing measures – 13 March 2020.

### **Risk Communication**

- Main messages: citizens to strictly adhere to the recommendations in order to stop the spread of the virus mainly in areas of Debar and Center Zhupa but also Struga, Ohrid and Kichevo;
- The Minister of Health is giving the updates after taking the technical advices of the Commission and is one voice for the measurements taken and cases reporting officially for press release, media and social media.
- Public health experts from the Institute of Public Health or other departments are appearing on the media for recommendation to the public for protection and prevention.
- The Institute of Public Health and the Ministry of Health produced a number of self-explanatory videos based on the WHO material and published in TV and social media in three different languages (Macedonian, English and Albanian), HANs (Health advice notice), HDF (Health declaration form), posters, leaflets etc.
- The Ministry of Information Society and Administration is obliged, in collaboration with the Ministry of Health and telephone and mobile operators, to consider the option of sending a circular message regarding the recommendations through mobile applications (text message, Viber message, etc.), especially to the younger population, to observe the conclusions, measures and recommendations concerning the prevention and spread of COVID-19 disease – 12 March, 2020.

### **Social distancing**

- Ministry of Health issued an order for implementing self-isolation for 2 weeks for every citizen of North Macedonia entering the country through the border crossings and is coming from the countries with the high or middle risk countries, according to the WHO's list.

### **Surveillance**

- Institute of Public Health is responsible institution for epidemiological and laboratory surveillance and response to threats from communicable disease at national level.
- All available surveillance systems for communicable disease are functional for detecting possible COVID-19 cases. Early Warning system is place and digitalized and based on syndromic approach.
- The surveillance network of communicable disease is composed of 10 Regional Centers for Public Health and 21 local Units of the Regional Public Health Centers, which are responsible for surveillance of communicable diseases, detection of clusters/outbreaks and response in their corresponding territory.
- Regular and timely reporting to IHR is ongoing.

## Community and NGO mobilization

- Red Cross has been active: through translation and distribution of WHO and IFRC's educational materials for prevention of COVID-19 into Macedonian and Albanian language.
- Red Cross volunteers were initially placed at all border crossings for conducting surveys on each passenger crossing the border.
- The migrants transit centers are adapted for quarantine, if needed for isolation of suspected COVID-19 among migrants.
- Red cross has distributed hygiene packages, disinfection materials and clothes to the people in the shelters in Vizbegovo, Skopje

## Hotline

- Hotlines are established for general information for measures, health care and other information related to COVID-19 to be referred to the "Alo Doctor" Call Center and the emergency hotlines of the Centers for Public Health/ Institute for Public Health are to be used exclusively for suspected and symptomatic cases, who have returned from high and medium risk countries, or have been in contact with a confirmed case – 16 March 2020. Foreign affairs has established their own hotlines for stranded nationals at borders or in other countries.

## IMPORTANT NUMBERS

<b>COVID-19 general information</b>	
"Alo Doctor" Call Center	02 15 123
<b>In case of symptoms and asymptomatic travelers</b>	
CPH Bitola	071 261 330
CPH Veles	071 219 278
CPH Gevgelija	078 545 444
CPH Kochani	071 373 913
CPH Kumanovo	070 215 851
CPH Ohrid	070 723 029
CPH Prilep	076 475 747
CPH Skopje	071 289 614
CPH Strumica	072 235 543
CPH Tetovo	075 240 464
RU Gostivar	076 365 161
CPH Shtip	078 365 613
IPH Skopje	078 387 194
<b>Psychological support</b>	
Parents of preschool and school children	072 912 676
Self-isolated adults	072 919 009
Citizens of municipalities Debar and Center Zhupa	070 241 807
<b>Foreign Affairs</b>	
Regular line, Viber and WhatsApp	075 273 732
Regular line	075 446 647

	Regular line, Viber and WhatsApp	070 282 078
<b>WHO</b>		
	Facebook/Twitter	@WHOMKD
<b>Ministry of Health</b>		
	Facebook/Twitter	@zdravstvomk