Overall strategy

The World Health Organization (WHO) Western Pacific Regional Office (WPRO) encourages countries to improve detection of COVID-19 transmission, to respond to detection with quick and targeted measures, and to focus efforts on preventing transmission among the vulnerable.

Key highlights

- New cases of COVID-19 were reported in 16 Western Pacific Region (WPR) countries or areas within the past seven days (Australia 364, China 152, Cambodia 1, French Polynesia 315, Guam 253, Japan 3 722, Republic of Korea 916, Lao People’s Democratic Republic 1, Malaysia 410, Mongolia 1, New Zealand 14, Northern Mariana Islands 2, Papua New Guinea 8, Philippines 27 420, Singapore 397, and Viet Nam 9).
- Three countries or areas in the WPR have reported no new cases within the past seven days (Brunei Darussalam, New Caledonia, and Fiji).
- American Samoa, Cook Islands, Kiribati, Marshall Islands, Micronesia (Federated States of), Nauru, Niue, Palau, Pitcairn Islands, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tokelau, Tonga, Tuvalu, Vanuatu, and Wallis and Futuna have not reported a case to date.

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Epi update

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<th>COVID-19</th>
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<th>Deaths</th>
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Supplies and logistics

Personal protective equipment for health workers shipped to 21 countries or areas over the past 6 months

- 4 690 050 surgical masks
- 821 995 particulate respirators
- 338 782 medical gowns
- 273 797 goggles
- 538 145 face shields
- 26 212 bottles (100mL) alcohol-based hand rub
- 880 500 pairs of gloves
- 269 472 laboratory tests shipped
Weekly situation updates

- In the Western Pacific Region, 19 countries or areas have reported COVID-19 cases since December 2019. Between 9 and 15 September 2020, a total of 33,985 cases with 901 deaths have been reported, for a cumulative 560,287 cases with 12,309 deaths (proportion of fatal cases (PFC) 2.2%) as of 16 September 2020, 10:00 (GMT+8). Available data indicate most countries or areas in the Western Pacific Region have identified imported cases\(^1\) or localized community transmission, while Guam, Papua New Guinea and the Philippines are considered to be at large-scale community transmission. Figure 1 shows the geographical distribution of cases reported in the last seven days.

- Globally, 29155,581 COVID-19 cases with 926,544 deaths have been reported in 216 countries or areas (3.2% PFC) as of 15 September 2020, 15:57 (GMT+8). New cases are continuing to rise in countries or areas of the WHO European Region and South-East Asian Region, while the trend continues to decrease in the WHO Americas Region (outside the United States), African Region, and Eastern Mediterranean Region.

Figure 1. Countries or areas with reported confirmed cases of COVID-19, covering the period from 9 September to 15 September 2020, as of 16 September 2020 10:00 (GMT+8)

\(^1\) No cases—no cases detected and no clear signals of transmission for at least 28 days (or two incubation periods); 1-Imported cases—cases reported in the past 28 days are imported or linked to importation within 3 generations, and there are no clear signals of local transmission; 2-Localized community transmission—cases reported in the past 28 days are locally acquired and localized, and there are no clear signals of large-scale community transmission; 3-Large-scale community transmission—most cases reported in the past 28 days have no known link, and there are clear signals of widespread and increasing transmission.
Figure 2. Current selected non-pharmaceutical interventions in countries or areas due to COVID-19, covering the period from 9 September to 15 September 2020, as of 16 September 2020 10:00 (GMT+8)

Figure 3. Epidemic curve of confirmed COVID-19 cases in countries or areas with >5 000 cases, covering the period from 9 September to 15 September 2020, as of 16 September 2020 10:00 (GMT+8)
Figure 4. Epidemic curve of confirmed COVID-19 cases in countries or areas with <5 000 cases, covering the period from 9 September to 15 September 2020, as of 16 September 2020 10:00 (GMT+8)

Table 1. Countries or areas with reported laboratory-confirmed COVID-19 cases and deaths, covering the period from 9 September to 15 September 2020, as of 16 September 2020 10:00 (GMT+8) (n = 560 287)
New guidance

- WHO WPRO published an interim guidance on “risk assessment and management of healthcare workers in the context of COVID-19”, which aims to support ministries, healthcare facility administrators, and occupational health staff in assessing healthcare worker exposure risks to suspected or confirmed COVID-19 patients and provide advice depending on whether a risk is deemed low or high. This guidance also addresses considerations for symptomatic healthcare workers and includes a section on return-to-work considerations.

- An interim guidance on infection prevention and control measures for all those who are involved with handling cargo during the COVID-19 pandemic was also published. Although no data suggest sources of infection via contact with cargo or any goods or products carried by air (e.g. small charter planes), water (e.g. ships, boats and canoes) or land (any vehicle), precautions should be in place. Key messages highlighted include the use of personal protective equipment, quarantine and considerations for cargo companies. The guidance will be updated as new evidence becomes available.
New science

- Evidence regarding the important role of adolescents and young adults in accelerating and sustaining COVID-19 outbreaks is growing. Furthermore, data suggest two known factors that contribute to high SARS-CoV-2 transmissibility - presymptomatic transmission and asymptomatic case presentations - may be amplified in adolescents and young adults. However, this group has not been prioritized as a key population in the public health response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Policy decisions that limit public health attention on adolescents and young adults are driven by the assumption of insignificant forward transmission from this group pose a risk to inadvertently reinvigorate local transmission dynamics. Guilamo-Ramos et al (2020) highlights evidence regarding the increased potential of adolescents and young adults to transmit SARS-CoV-2 that, to date, has received little attention. It is necessary to discuss specific considerations for future COVID-19 control measures and provide applied programmatic suggestions regarding the role of adolescents and young adults.

New communications materials

The #COVID19 pandemic is a stressful time for everyone. Protect your #MentalHealth by practicing #SelfCare.

Reach out to a trusted adult or professional if you need help. Always remember, you are not alone.

Learn more 👍 here

References
Are valved masks recommended to prevent transmission?

Q: Are valved masks recommended to prevent transmission?

A: No. The exhalation valve on these masks allows exhaled respiratory droplets to escape the mask and reach others. This can potentially spread the virus causing COVID-19. Therefore, we do not recommend people using masks if they have an exhalation valve or vent.

If there is widespread community transmission, especially in settings where physical distancing cannot be maintained, the public is encouraged to wear non-medical, fabric masks. However, it is important to note that masks should only be used as part of a comprehensive strategy. Masks on their own will not protect individuals from COVID-19. People should also clean their hands frequently and maintain a distance of at least 1 meter from others.

Key information and announcements

Finance and administration

- A total of 182 experts have been deployed as of 16 September 2020. There are 20 consultants in WHO Country Offices, 24 consultants actively supporting WHO Regional Offices and 25 consultants working remotely.

- WHO WPRO continues to fill human resource gaps of critical Incident Management Support Team (IMST) functions through the World Health Emergencies Program roster and posting advertisements to the United Nations Global Market.

Health service delivery

Mental Health

- Planning has begun for a series of Member State consultations between October and December to discuss and identify opportunities arising out of the COVID-19 response to support long-term mental health system strengthening in the region.
Information and planning

● WHO WPRO and the WHO Country Office in Mongolia are working to support Mongolia to revise their COVID-19 operational response plan to prepare for the upcoming winter season.

● WHO WPRO continues to monitor contact tracing strategies used in the region and is assessing new technology that may assist Member States to strengthen their contact tracing capacity.

Operations support and logistics

● Genexpert cartridges from Cepheid continue to be allocated to the Western Pacific Region. WHO WPRO Operations and Logistics team has collected 40.17% of the total number of kits procured with a total of 38,800 cartridges.

● WHO WPRO has commenced for the procurement of flu vaccines for Mongolia in preparation for the winter flu season.

Partner coordination

Health Systems and Partner Coordination

● WHO WPRO and WHO South-East Asian Region (SEARO), in collaboration with Asian Development Bank and the Government of Japan, hosted a seminar on 17 September 2020 that brought together finance and health ministers to discuss accelerating progress toward Universal Health Care (UHC) in Asia and the Pacific in the new COVID-19 era.

Strategic communication

● WHO WPRO continues to strengthen social listening activities to inform the broader pandemic response across the region. WPRO produces bi-weekly updates summarising recent findings from perception and behaviour surveys and social listening activities such as social media monitoring, media monitoring. These are used to inform all technical teams through the IMST and WHO Country Offices. Major topics covered this week included risk perception and online discussion on a possible COVID-19 vaccine, the use of masks and face shields, and contact tracing measures.

● The WHO Country Office in Lao People’s Democratic Republic published a new feature story on how WHO is coordinating with national stakeholders to expand COVID-19 testing capacity.

● A new YouTube video was published on the WPRO channel with WHO Regional Director for the Western Pacific Region Dr Takeshi Kasai speaking for World Patient Safety Day 2020 on the theme “Health workers safety: a priority for patient safety”.

● Five videos, four on suicide prevention and one on contact tracing, with Malay subtitles were uploaded to the WPRO YouTube channel.

● A new feature story, “Protecting older people against COVID-19,” was published on the WPRO website.