

COVID-19 CASES IN THE GAZA STRIP

Weekly epidemiological bulletin from 29/11-5/12 to 6/12-12/12 2020

DATA SOURCES: MINISTRY OF HEALTH (MOH) DAILY REPORTS ON COVID-19 IN GAZA STRIP

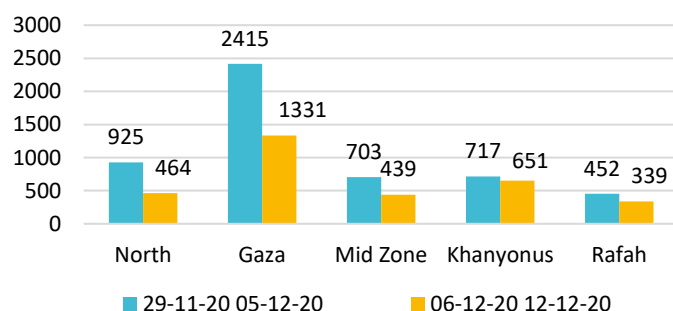
GENERAL

Reporting Period	Weekly cases		Cumulative
	29/11-5/12	6/12-12/12	
# of samples tested	total 17,075	9,477	215,752
# of positive cases	total 5222	3,224	28,344
Classification of positive cases by severity*	mild 5112	3,181	
	moderate 48	23	
	severe 42	14	
	critical 20	6	
Positivity rate	total 30.6%	34.02%	13.1%
	contacts 28.1%	43.5%	
	suspect 39.0%	48.5%	
	surveillance 29.7%	15.9%	

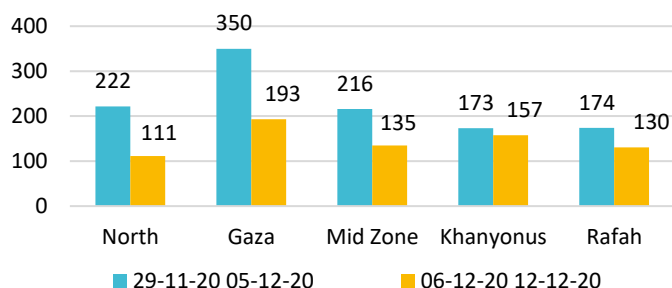
* The reported classification of positive cases by severity reflects the status at first day of detection. This classification may change over time according to progression of COVID-19 infection among patients.

- On 1 December 2020, the MOH changed the laboratory testing criteria for COVID-19 where close contacts will only be tested if they are above 50 years or for younger people only if they have known co-morbidities, decreasing the number of random tests according to the availability of testing kits. Testing for suspect cases remains unchanged.
- The Central Laboratory did not perform any SARS-COV2 PCR tests on 7 December 2020 when MOH reportedly had run out of testing kits. WHO provided 195 testing kits for approximately 19,000 tests.
- The modified testing criteria and reduction in the number of conducted COVID-19 tests, will have its effect on the overall statistics of COVID-19 in the two reporting periods. Accordingly, the figures below show a decline in the newly reported cases, as well as in the incidence per 100,000 population in all Gaza districts. This decrease does not necessarily indicate a real decrease of COVID-19 spread at community level.

Newly reported COVID-19 cases by district



Reported COVID-19 incidence/100,000 population by district



- The PNIPH/WHO supported MOH in developing a traffic light system (TLS) which distributes the newly detected COVID-19 cases geographically throughout the Gaza Strip neighbourhoods during the previous 7 days. This system classifies the neighbourhoods by colour code (Red, Yellow, Green) to visualise the high-risk areas and support decisions.
- The MAP below (developed by MOH) reflects that 68 out of 96 neighbourhoods were coded by red colour on 6 December 2020, compared to around 63 on 30 November.



30 November 2020

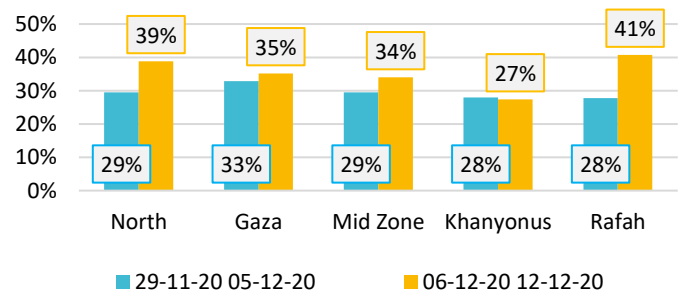


6 December 2020

POSITIVITY RATES

- Positivity rates have been continuously increasing in the last reporting periods before the change in testing criteria, and continue to increase after changing the testing criteria.
- The positivity rate increased to 34% from 30% comparing between the two reporting weeks. The figure on the right illustrates the increase along all Gaza Strip districts.
- The positivity rate increased to 43.5% from 28% among contacts as a direct effect of the change in testing criteria. The positivity rate increased to 48.5% from 39% among suspected cases. The coming weeks will provide a more accurate reflection on the real COVID-19 situation.

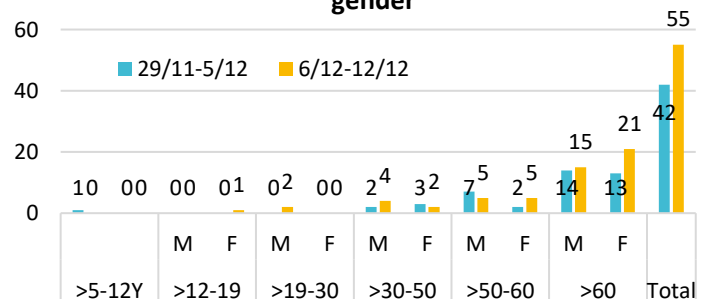
Reported COVID-19 positivity rates by district



DISTRIBUTION OF COVID-19 DEATHS

- The figure on the right illustrates the distribution of deaths by gender and age group in the two reporting periods.
- There has been a continuous increase in reported COVID-19 deaths during the last three reporting periods: 55 deaths were reported from 6-12 December, compared to 42 deaths in the preceding week.
- Two deaths among children were reported during the two reporting periods: one girl was a haemodialysis patient, and one boy was a cerebral palsy patient. This reflects that the outbreak is reaching more vulnerable people.
- Deaths among younger age groups are more regularly reported, including 2 male deaths from the age group 19-30 from 6-12 December. One of them was a 24-years old medical student.
- Six deaths were reported among the age group >30-50 from 6-12 December, compared to five deaths in the preceding week. Total 19 deaths were reported among the age group >50-60 (9 in the first period and 10 in the second reporting period).

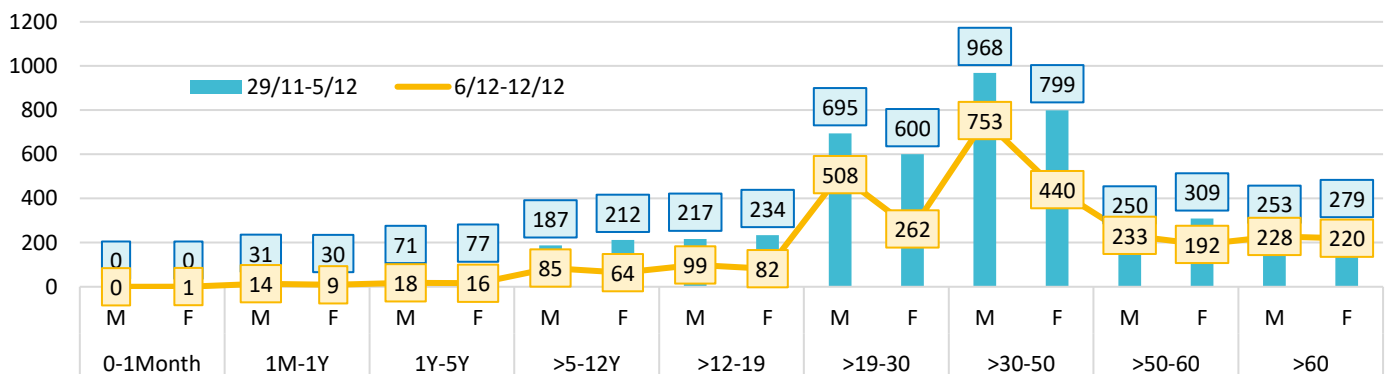
Reported COVID-19 deaths by age group and gender



- Deaths among the age group >60 increased to 36 from 27 comparing between the two reporting periods. It is worth noting that the deaths among females above 60 years increased to 21 from 15, while among males in the same age group the number of deaths reported decreased from 14 to 13 when comparing between the two reporting weeks.
- According to MOH, the total number of reported deaths since the start of COVID-19 outbreak in Gaza Strip until 12 December 2020 reached 194 deaths, while the accumulative COVID-19 fatality rate reached 0.68% (194 deaths/28,345 COVID-19 cases).
- Around 50% of reported deaths were reported at European Gaza Hospital (EGH is the assigned hospital for treatment of severe and critical COVID-19 cases) from 6-12 December, compared to 57% in the preceding week. This decrease might be related to the high occupancy rates at EGH leading to admission of COVID-19 patients in ICUs of other hospitals (Shifa, Naser and Indonesian hospitals). This situation should be closely monitored.

DISTRIBUTION OF COVID-19 CASES AMONG AGE GROUPS AND GENDER

Newly reported COVID-19 cases distributed by age group and gender

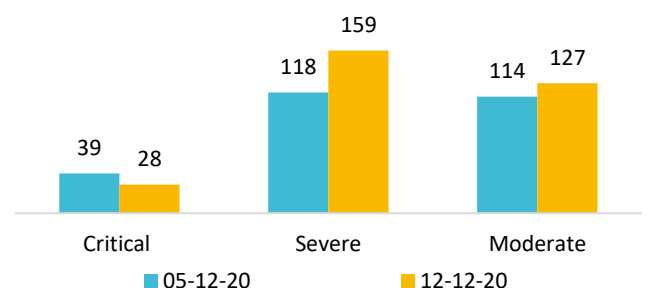


- The figure above illustrates the reported COVID-19 cases distributed by age group and gender comparing between the two reporting weeks. There is a decrease in newly reported COVID-19 cases among all age groups as a result of changing the testing criteria. Moreover, the government took a decision to close all schools in the Gaza Strip excluding the 12th grade starting on 5 December 2020. This might have contributed to the decreasing number of reported COVID-19 cases among school age groups, besides the change in testing criteria.
- Monitoring of the data with the new testing criteria will continue.

DISTRIBUTION OF COVID-19 CASES BY SEVERITY

- The total accumulative moderate cases increased to 127 on 12 December from 114 cases on 5 December. Severe cases increased to 159 from 118.
- Critical cases decreased to 28 cases from 39 cases. This decrease is not in line with the increase of moderate and severe cases and also the sharp increase in COVID-19 deaths. This might indicate that COVID-19 cases are not accessing the required care and thus will not be counted among critical cases who were admitted to health care.

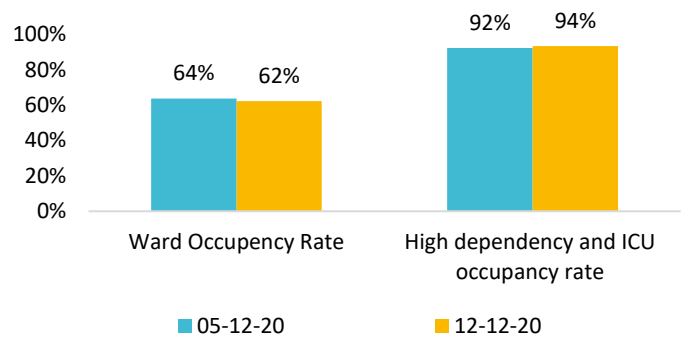
Accumulative reported COVID-19 cases distributed by severity



HEALTH SYSTEM CAPACITY (COVID-19 MANAGEMENT)

- As high dependency and ICU occupancy rates nearly reached 100%, MOH increased the high dependency and ICU bed capacity up to 200 beds, aimed at providing care for an increasing number of COVID-19 patients.
- The occupancy rate of high dependency and ICU beds (for severe and critical cases) increased to 94% from 92% between the two reporting periods, explained by the increase in the reported COVID-19 infections at community level where older age groups and other vulnerable groups are at higher risk of developing severe complications.
- The total ward occupancy rate slightly decreased to 62% on 12 December from 64% on 5 December.

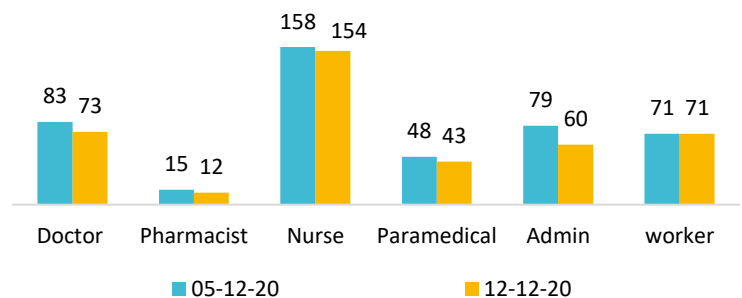
COVID-19 bed occupancy rate by type of bed



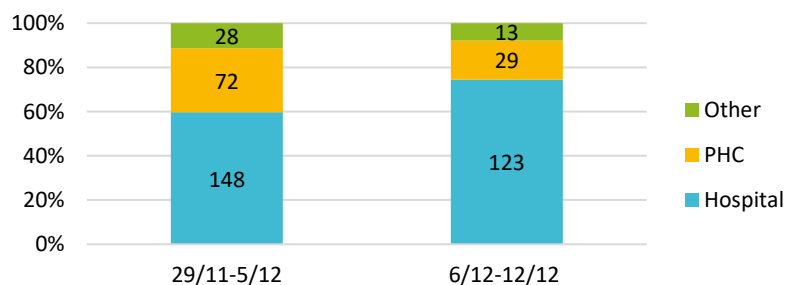
HEALTH CARE WORKERS INFECTIONS

- The number of newly reported COVID-19 cases among health workforce decreased comparing the two reporting weeks.
- Due to the interruption of SARS-COV2 PCR testing at the central laboratory on 7 December 2020, it cannot be concluded that the COVID-19 infection among health workforce actually decreased, unless a decreasing trend will continue during the coming weeks.
- Most of the reported COVID-19 infections among health workers were at hospital settings, representing 75% between 6-12 December compared to 60% in the preceding week.
- As reported last week, there was an increase in percentage of health workforce infected with COVID-19 at primary health care settings. This increase declined during this reporting period but it does not necessarily indicate any real decrease at PHC settings.
- The group "others" of the health facilities represents supporting services, administrative, and engineering departments.

Active COVID-19 cases among health workforce



Distribution of new COVID-19 infections among health workforce distributed by place of work



RECOMMENDATIONS

- MOH changed the COVID-19 testing criteria, impacting the newly reported COVID-19 cases and positivity rates. The situation should be closely monitored while implementing the new testing criteria to better analyse the situation.
- COVID-19 deaths are increasingly reported among younger age groups. Further efforts are needed to protect vulnerable people at all ages.
- The reported decrease of COVID-19 infections among health workforce might be related to the decreasing testing capacity at the central laboratory: continuous efforts to implement and monitor Infection Prevention and Control (IPC) measures at all health care settings are urgently needed.
- Despite efforts to increase the high dependency and ICU bed capacity up to 200 beds, the occupancy reached 94%, representing the highest occupancy rate since the beginning of community transmission of COVID-19 in Gaza. Furthermore, a higher number of COVID-19 deaths are reported outside EGH hospital reflecting the need for stricter IPC measures at other hospitals in Gaza Strip, more PPE supplies and capacity building for health workers.
- The authorities in Gaza Strip started a new package of stricter public health measures including closure of schools and mosques, and restricted movement after 6:30 pm starting 5 December, as well as a total lockdown every Friday and Saturday starting 11 December. The impact of these measures on the COVID-19 situation in the Gaza Strip during the coming period will be closely monitored.
- The health situation in Gaza Strip remains critical and fragile and in need of continuous external support.