



## North & East Syria Coronavirus Update

Week Ending 06 SEPTEMBER 2020

### Coronavirus Cases

	Overall	New This Week
Total Cases	624	97
Deaths	40	6
Recoveries	158	70

### Cases by Region

Jazira region: 82

Deir-ez-Zor region: 3

Euphrates region: 11

Shehba pocket: 1

### Key Developments

- Detected coronavirus cases double in Euphrates region despite severe under-testing
- Slowdown in reported cases and deaths in worst-hit Jazira region and across NES as a whole
- NES has the lowest testing rate of any part of Syria and the highest rate of positive results relative to tests performed, report finds
- 200,000 IDPs in Shehba pocket suffer shortages of medical supplies and aid drought due to Syrian Government embargo
- Deir-ez-Zor, Euphrates, Shehba struggling to get corona facilities online

### In Depth

#### Coronavirus cases double in Euphrates region despite severe under-testing

11 Coronavirus cases were detected in the Euphrates region, up from 6 last week. This is despite the fact that the testing facility in Kobane is still not fully functioning, with a majority of these cases being confined among health-workers. This suggests coronavirus is likely far more widespread. As RIC has previously reported, coronavirus restrictions being inconsistently applied in Jazira region were scarcely being applied at all in major Euphrates population centers like Raqqa, sparking the fear of further infection.



## Slowdown in reported cases and deaths in worst-hit Jazira region and across NES as a whole

For the first time since the start of the present outbreak, this week saw a decrease in the number of reported coronavirus cases, with 97 new cases – down from 145 last week – and 6 deaths compared to 7 last week. There have also been no new cases confirmed in Hol Camp following the detection of a first case there last week. Nonetheless, concerns about severe under-testing across NES remain.

An AANES decision to relax coronavirus restrictions on movement between cities and re-open its civil society institutions was criticized by health workers and NGOs, though the AANES did agree to postpone the reopening of schools until October. AANES officials are struggling to find a balance between the need to keep the region's economy working and prevent mass hunger, and the ongoing need for coronavirus restrictions. The Syrian pound has dropped 400% in value since this time last year, and many locals are unable to afford basic necessities, let alone medicine, masks or sanitary supplies, the prices of all of which are rapidly increasing.

## NES has the lowest testing rate of any part of Syria and the highest rate of positive results relative to tests performed, report finds

A report published by Syria Direct focused on the crisis in NES, warning:

“Northeast Syria has the lowest testing rate of any other part of Syria—404 tests per million people as of August 25—and the highest rate of positive results relative to tests performed. Around 30 percent of tests conducted thus far have been positive, According to the WHO, a positive ratio greater than five percent indicates severe under-testing in a population.”

“In the city of Qamishli, for example, only 60 to 70 tests can be performed a day because there is only one lab team capable of performing them... Even before the Syrian revolution and the ensuing war in 2011, northeast Syria had the lowest medical capacity in the country. After nine years of war, the area's capacity has only further degraded; there were only 22 Intensive Care Unit (ICU) beds available for four million people as of late March.

## Deir-ez-Zor, Euphrates, Shehba struggling to get corona facilities online

Outside of Jazira region, little to no testing, contact tracing or isolation is taking place. Per a recent UN report, “Significant work, including additional equipment, is still required before all isolation centers can be fully activated, although NGO-supported facilities in Menbij, Tabqa, Raqqa, Malikiyah, Ein Issa and Kobane should be partially operational in the next ten days.”

The lack of capacity particularly affects the Euphrates and Deir-ez-Zor regions, where local authorities without the resource to well-equipped coronavirus facilities are struggling to make locals take the coronavirus threat seriously.



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## 200,000 IDPs in Shehba pocket suffer shortages of medical supplies and aid drought due to Syrian Government embargo

These concerns extend to the isolated, IDP-populated Shehba pocket, home to around 200,000 Kurdish IDPs displaced during the 2018 Turkish invasion of Afrin and now surviving under a Syrian Government-enforced embargo.

Speaking to RIC, a medical source in Shehba said: “we all know that in Aleppo and the regime-controlled areas, the virus has reached an explosive situation. The IDPs are afraid of the sick, who arrive in Shehba from Aleppo via illegal routes (smuggling). No-one would go to the hospital in Aleppo, since we all know the health system is collapsed.”

“We have not received any aid save for deliveries from the AANES, which arrived with great difficulty, due to bribes demanded by the Syrian Government’s security checkpoints. The Russian forces do not help at all, and we have received nothing from international agencies or United Nations.”

“Due to the embargo imposed on the area and the restrictions imposed by the checkpoints of the security services of the Syrian regime, IDPs have found and are finding great difficulty in securing masks and medical gloves, which cost a lot. Pharmacies sell masks and gloves at high prices, with each mask costing 500-1000SYP. Those who cannot afford this rely on the handmade ones or remain without masks.”

The source added that health authorities in Shehba were struggling to afford enough PPE for their staff, and that a workshop which had hand-produced around 10,000 masks had to shut down due to lack of materials.