UNOG Bi-weekly press briefing: COVID-19 Yemen - OCHA

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Shotlist

2. SOUNDBITE (EN) – Jens Laerke, Spokesperson for the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA): “Yemen is really on the brink right now. The situation is extremely alarming, they are talking about that the health system has in effect collapsed. They are talking about having to turn people away because they do not have enough oxygen. They do not have enough Personal Protective Equipment, that the numbers that are officially reported are important parts, as I said, we are working on the assumption that there is wide spread communal transmission going on”.
3. Close up: Flag in front of UN Geneva building
4. SOUNDBITE (EN) - Jens Laerke, Spokesperson for the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA): “We are heading towards a fiscal cliff. If we do not get the money coming in, the programs that are keeping people alive and are very much essential to fight back against Covid will have to close. And then, the world will have to witness what happens in a country without a functioning health system battling Covid 19 and I do not think that one will see that”.
5. Medium shot: UN Geneva flag alley
6. SOUNDBITE (EN) – Jens Laerke, Spokesperson for the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA): “The actual incidence is almost certainly much higher. Tests remain in short supply, aid agencies in Yemen are operating on the basis that community transmission is taking place across the country, and only half of the health facilities are fully functioning. Yemen’s health system needs significant assistance to counter the threat of Covid-
19. Humanitarian aid agencies are scaling up outreach, prevention and case management. “
7. Medium shot: UN Geneva Palais des Nations
8. SOUNDBITE (EN) – Jens Laerke, Spokesperson for the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA): “Colleagues both in and out of the country are working together to deliver critical programs, this includes some international staff working remotely as well as international staff remain in Yemen and Yemeni national staff. Yemeni national staff remain the large majority of aid workers in Yemen”.
9. Medium shot: UN flag in background ICRC building
The Covid-19 pandemic is severely exacerbating the humanitarian crisis in Yemen, says OCHA

Yemen, a war-torn country, will be left to fight a Covid-19 pandemic with a collapsed health system without additional funding, warned today the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA).

Epidemiologists estimate that the virus could spread faster, more widely and with deadlier consequences in some of the world’s most vulnerable populations than in many other countries.

Speaking to a virtual press conference at the United Nations in Geneva, Jens Larke, spokesperson for the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) said that “Yemen is really on the brink right now. The situation is extremely alarming, they are talking about that the health system has in effect collapsed. They are talking about having to turn people away because they do not have enough oxygen. They do not have enough Personal Protective Equipment (PPE), that the numbers that are officially reported are important parts, as I said, we are working on the assumption that there is widespread communal transmission going on”.

With only half of Yemen’s health facilities fully functioning, funding for the country’s aid operation is crucial with up to USD 2 billion required until the end of the year. The UN and Saudi Arabia will co-host a virtual pledging event on 2 June to support fund raising.

“We are heading towards a fiscal cliff”, said OCHA’s spokesperson. “If we do not get the money coming in, the programs that are keeping people alive and are very much essential to fight back against Covid will have to close. And then, the world will have to witness what happens in a country without a functioning health system battling Covid 19 and I do not think that one will see that”.

More than 30 key UN programmes risk closing in the coming weeks due to a funding lack. Covid Rapid Response Teams are funded only for the next six weeks.

According to the World Healths Organisation’s latest figures, Yemen has 184 cases and 30 deaths.

However, “the actual incidence is almost certainly much higher”, stated Jens Laerke. “Tests remain in short supply, aid agencies in Yemen are operating on the basis that community transmission is taking place across the country, and only half of the health facilities are fully functioning. Yemen’s health system needs significant assistance to counter the threat of Covid-19. Humanitarian aid agencies are scaling up outreach, prevention and case management. “

Some 125 metric tons of supplies have arrived, while over 6,600 metric tons of tests, personal protective equipment and Intensive Care Unit (ICU) supplies are in the pipeline.

However, oxygen and personal protective equipment are more urgently needed. Preserving large-scale existing aid programmes in health, water and sanitation, nutrition and other sectors also offers an essential defense against infection for millions of people.

Yesterday, a UN flight arrived in Yemen’s capital Aden with more international staff on board.

Laerke said that “colleagues both in and out of the country are working together to deliver critical programs, this includes some international staff working remotely as well as international staff remain in Yemen and Yemeni national staff. Yemeni national staff remain the large majority of aid workers in Yemen”.

The war in Yemen has been ongoing since 2014 when Houthis took control of Yemen’s north and captured the capital Sanaa, forcing the UN-recognised government there to flee to Aden. Since 2015, a Saudi-led coalition of mostly Arab countries has been battling the Houthi rebels to reinstate the government
of President Abd-Rabbu Mansour Hadi creating the world’s worst humanitarian crisis and leaving millions suffering from food and medical shortages.