



# Jordan's COVID-19 Situation Report

March 23, 2021

## OVERVIEW

In early February, the head of the Epidemic Assessment Committee, Saad Al-Kharabshesh, warned officials and citizens that Jordan was witnessing a gradual increase in the number of COVID-19 infections, in addition to a growing positive PCR test rate since the beginning of the month. Al-Kharabshesh attributed the rapid spread to the new, mutated COVID-19 strain in Jordan, which has proven to be 50-70% more infectious.<sup>1</sup>

It is one month later and Jordan finds itself in a very difficult COVID-19 situation with record-breaking numbers. As of March 23, 2021, Jordan has experienced a cumulative number of 553,727 COVID-19 cases, with 6,077 deaths and 9,003 new active cases.<sup>2</sup> The severe spike in the daily caseload in March is attributed mainly to the faster transmission of the variant first identified in Britain which started to spread in Jordan as early as December. In response to the growing spike, the government has reimposed stricter measures across the kingdom including curfew hours that start at 6:00pm for establishments and 7:00pm for individuals until 6:00am and a total lockdown on Fridays. On Monday, King Abdullah met with the country's top officials stating that the figures the country is facing are "frightening."<sup>3</sup> The Jordan Ministry of Health (MoH) indicators reflect that the virus is predominantly spreading in Amman with almost 4,000 cases.<sup>4</sup>

Jordan finds itself in a critical health situation in terms of the rapid increase in daily infections, the death toll, hospital occupancy rates and citizens' adherence to COVID-19 precautionary measures. Minister of Interior Mazen Al Faraya announced that some of the ministry's hospitals have reached a critical stage in terms of capacity, noting that the ministry is now working to contract with private hospitals in order to relieve the burden on the public health sector.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> [Royal News: Jordan Enters New Wave](#)

<sup>2</sup> <https://corona.moh.gov.jo/en>

<sup>3</sup> [Jordan reports highest daily tally of COVID-19 cases](#)

<sup>4</sup> [Jordan records 92 deaths and 9,003 new coronavirus cases](#)

<sup>5</sup> [Al-Faraya: The health situation in Jordan is critical](#)

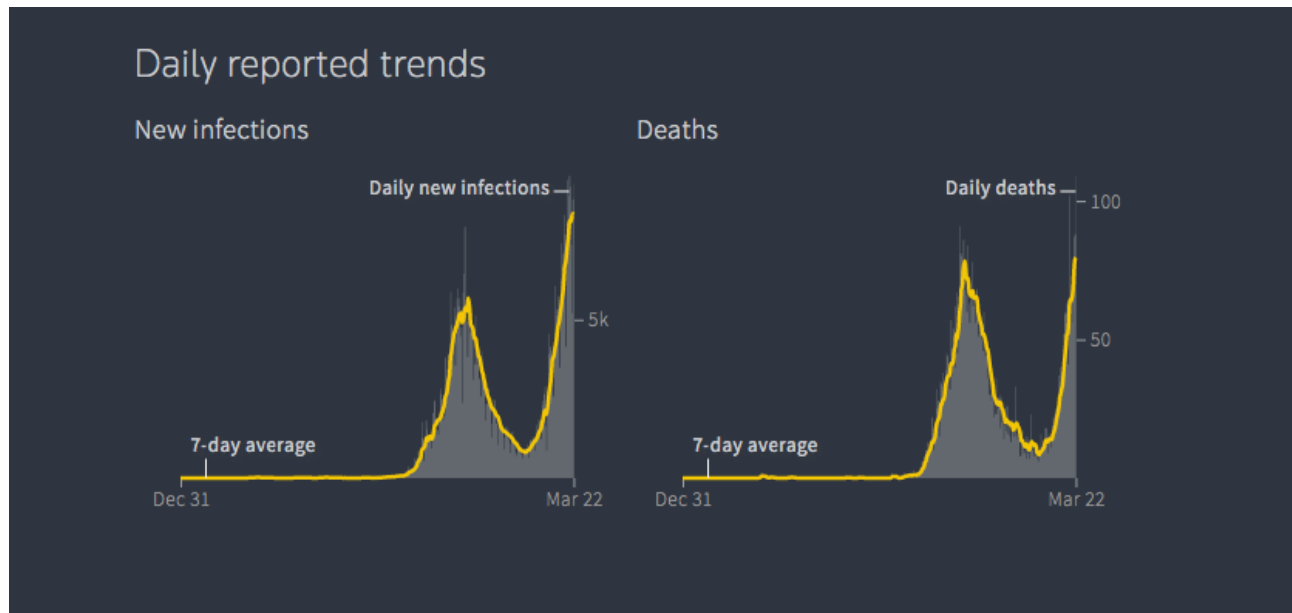


Image Source: Reuters COVID-19 Tracker Jordan (click image to visit webpage)

In recent days, oxygen shortages have led to the deaths of seven patients at Al Hussein New Hospital, in the city of Salt, west of Amman. Adnan Abbas, director of the National Center for Forensic Medicine, announced that the victims were four men and three women, all aged over 40, who had been on ventilators and who were being treated for COVID-19 at the time. The oxygen shortages lasted for about an hour, reportedly also affecting intensive care units and maternity wards.

Angry protesters gathered around the hospital as they learned more information about the incident. Minister of Health Nazir Obeidat announced his resignation to Jordan's prime minister, taking full moral responsibility for the incident. Attorney General Hassan Abadallat also confirmed "that all the evidence collected pointed to negligence and lack of consideration of laws by all the suspects." The number of suspects in the case has reached 13, all of whom were arrested on account of the case.<sup>6</sup>

Over the past few days, Jordan has witnessed protests erupting across the kingdom in defiance of the night curfew. Frustrated citizens are calling on the government to resign and demanding an end to emergency laws, since the outset of the pandemic. The curfew has been extended several times since it was imposed a year ago, most recently on Saturday amid a dangerous surge in COVID-19 infections. Jordan's already fragile economy has been particularly hard hit with the official unemployment rate reaching 24% and vulnerability deepening. The lockdowns follow a pattern in which the government has

<sup>6</sup> [Seven COVID-19 Patients Die After Oxygen Fails at Jordan Hospital](#)

alternately imposed restrictions on travel and business to mitigate the spread of the virus, and then lifting them in an effort to revamp the economy.



Image Source: The National News, “Protests Erupt in Jordan After COVID-19 Hospital Deaths”

## COVID-19 VACCINATIONS

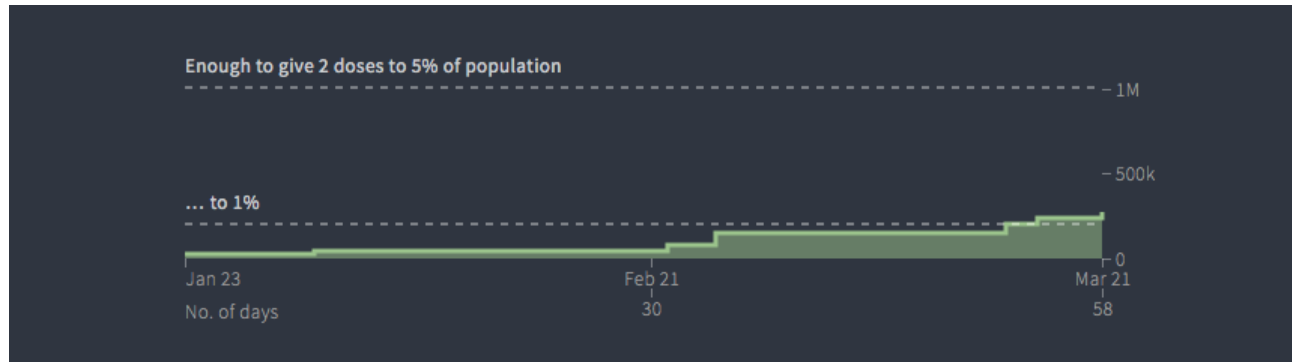
**On March 12, the first round of 144,000 AstraZeneca doses arrived in Amman through the COVAX initiative.** The EU raised eight million euros for this endeavor, showing the necessity of foreign financing to deliver much needed vaccines to less developed economies.<sup>7</sup> Another 2.2 million doses of the COVID-19 vaccine from Pfizer/BioNTech are slated to arrive in the coming months, along with undisclosed amounts from the UAE and China.<sup>8</sup> The COVAX program aims to provide vaccine doses for at least 20% of the population of recipient countries.

In preparation for the rollout of its national vaccination drive, the MoH launched an online registration portal for people to sign up for their vaccinations and established 29 vaccination centers. Vaccinations are being administered in order of priority, with elderly people with chronic illnesses, first responders, doctors and nurses first. Jordan has administered more than 272,000 doses of COVID-19 vaccines so far. Assuming every person needs two doses, that’s enough to have vaccinated only 1.3% of the country’s 10 million population. This past week, Jordan averaged approximately 7,523 doses

<sup>7</sup> [Relief Web: Jordan First Shipment COVID Vaccines](#)

<sup>8</sup> [Reuters: Jordan to accelerate COVID Drive](#)

administered each day. At this rate, it will take almost 300 days to administer enough doses for another 10% of the population.<sup>9</sup>



Vaccine Rollout Data is accumulated using the number of distributed vaccines, not the number of people vaccinated. Because of different rollout schedules and the use of both single and double dose vaccines, we do not have an accurate number of the amount of people who have been fully immunized.

Image Source: Reuters COVID-19 Tracker Jordan (click image to visit webpage)

The National Center for Security and Crisis Management aims to reach 68,000 people during the campaign's first phase, adding that 30,223 people have registered for their vaccinations to date. This brings the total number of citizens and residents who registered on the MoH's online platform to 734,811. According to the center, a total of 331,486 women and 403,325 men registered for the vaccinations since the launch of the platform. A total of 161,788 people aged 60 years and over registered to be vaccinated, which is the highest percentage among all age groups.

Despite slight progress in the number of people getting vaccinated, Jordan still has a long way to go to achieve herd immunity. Over six million people need to be vaccinated to meet the needs of the entire population before the country can begin to return to pre-COVID conditions. Jordan aims to vaccinate 20%-25% of its population in the coming months. Senate member Ahmad Al-Hindawi addressed that the percentage of those who have received the COVID-19 vaccine is still very low compared to neighboring countries. Hindawi emphasized that Jordan is still behind in its campaign to vaccinate citizens.

**In January, Jordan became the first country in the world to launch a comprehensive, free-of-charge vaccination program for refugees and asylum seekers as a part of its national vaccination plan.**<sup>10</sup> Jordan, a country of 10 million people, hosts more than 650,000 Syrian refugees registered with UNHCR. Approximately 80% of these refugees are living and working in Jordan's urban areas and will be vaccinated at local health clinics in host communities. UNHCR is coordinating its vaccine efforts with the government of Jordan and the MoH to administer vaccines to in-camp

<sup>9</sup> [Reuters COVID-19 Tracker-Jordan](#)

<sup>10</sup> [Refugee receive COVID-19 vaccinations in Jordan](#)



refugees. According to Mohammad Hawari, UNHCR's spokesperson in Jordan, "It's the first vaccination center in the world to open in a refugee camp." This is a commendable step in the right direction and UNHCR has called on other countries hosting refugees to follow suit.

Zaatari Camp houses approximately 80,000 Syrian refugees, 2,000 of whom have been registered to receive vaccines as of mid-February.<sup>11</sup> Vaccinations are also being administered in Azraq Camp as of mid-March.<sup>12</sup> Strong adherence to prevention measures has played a key role in limiting the spread of the virus among vulnerable communities such as refugee camps. The first COVID-19 case among in-camp refugees in Jordan was confirmed in September 2020. As of mid-March, roughly 1,000 refugees had been vaccinated by UNHCR. Refugees can also register for the vaccine directly through the Ministry of Health.



Image Source: UNHCR, "Refugees from Za'atari Camp are Receiving the COVID-19 Vaccine"

## ECONOMIC IMPACTS

COVID-19 restrictions have particularly impacted the Jordanian economy, hampering movement and business operations. Movement restrictions put pressure on food security within the country. In 2020, 17% of Jordanians, many of whom were female heads of household, permanently lost their jobs, and unemployment rose nationally to a high of 26%. As a result of containment measures and other economic impacts of COVID-19, 53%

<sup>11</sup> [Arab News: Jordan Starts 'World First' Vaccination Program in Refugee Camp](#)

<sup>12</sup> [Relief Web: UNHCR COVID-19 Vaccinations Update #2](#)

(some three million people) are at risk of food insecurity in addition to the 3% (approximately 219,000 individuals) who were already food insecure. The impact is worse among Jordan's refugee community, with 21% facing food insecurity.<sup>13</sup>

Small-medium enterprises reported challenges related to cash flow and supply chain interruptions, with only 7% of businesses operating at pre-COVID capacity.<sup>14</sup> Forty-three percent of small businesses indicated in an April 2020 ILO survey that they could only continue to pay employee salaries for less than one month and an additional 42% indicated that they can only continue to pay employee salaries for less than three months. Unsurprisingly, unemployment rose throughout late 2020. **The problem is especially acute among refugees, who face job insecurity at much higher rates.**<sup>15</sup> According to UNICEF, the number of households in Jordan with an income of less than 100 JD (140 USD) per month doubled since the beginning of the pandemic.<sup>16</sup> Job losses increased poverty rates by 38% among locals and 18% among refugees by December 2020, limiting access to basic needs.<sup>17</sup>

## CHILDREN AND YOUTH

Evidence shows that adolescents are disproportionately affected by COVID-19 and its secondary impacts. During lockdowns, 28% of Jordanian children went to bed hungry, dropping to 15% of children after lockdowns were lifted, due to parental employment disruptions. Since the pandemic, four out of ten families in Jordan have not been able to purchase the hygiene products that their households need. Hygiene is a particularly important defense against contracting COVID-19 and other pathogens in Jordan, given that 17% of children under five have not received their basic vaccinations and 23% did not have access to medical attention for illnesses during the pandemic.<sup>18</sup>

As of December 2020, Jordan hosts approximately 750,000 registered refugees according to UNHCR.<sup>19</sup> Nearly half of this population is composed of children under the age of 18 who already faced education barriers before the pandemic.<sup>20</sup> With a population of 3.2 million students in an area where remote learning was uncommon prior to COVID-19, Jordan's education system is strained. Refugee students in particular lack access to technology for remote learning.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> [Jordan Food Security Update: Implications of COVID-19](#)

<sup>14</sup> [Impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on enterprises in Jordan](#)

<sup>15</sup> [Impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on enterprises in Jordan](#)

<sup>16</sup> [UNICEF study highlights plight of children and youth in Jordan during COVID-19](#)

<sup>17</sup> [Compounding Misfortunes: Changes in Poverty since the onset of COVID-19 on Syrian Refugees and Host Communities in Jordan, the Kurdistan Region of Iraq and Lebanon](#)

<sup>18</sup> [UNICEF study highlights plight of children and youth in Jordan during COVID-19](#)

<sup>19</sup> [Supporting Refugees in Jordan: what we achieved in 2020](#)

<sup>20</sup> [Syrian refugees | ACAPS](#)

<sup>21</sup> [Exploring the impacts of COVID-19 on adolescents in Jordan's refugee camps and host communities](#)

In addition to remote learning barriers, COVID-19 has increased protection risks for children, including increased risk of child marriage. **The economic crisis and the status of out-of-school children has put an unparalleled strain on vulnerable households as families use any available means to survive.** Under such difficult economic circumstances, child labor is used as a coping mechanism for many families. According to a study conducted by Jordan Labor Watch, “child labor will increase significantly due to the repercussions of the COVID-19 crisis and its economic and social consequences, including also a dramatic increase in the unemployment rate and consequently, in poverty rates.”<sup>22</sup>

## ANERA’S RESPONSE

In early 2020, Anera resumed operations in Jordan after being absent from the country for several years. This hiatus ended with our medical donations program delivering two pilot shipments to in-country recipients Jordan Medical Aid for Palestinians (JMAP) and the Syrian American Medical Society. The shipments, valued at \$18,000 and \$12,000 respectively, included chronic medicines and vitamin D droplets. Both recipients continue to experience roadblocks due to COVID-19.

Anera is now working to complete a shipment of chronic medicines to Jordan valued at \$168,000, which we will distribute to JMAP and several other new recipients. Despite facing significant delays due to COVID-19 restrictions at the port and with the consignee, the Jordanian Food and Drug Administration approved Anera’s shipment, so the donor will ship it to Jordan soon. Anera will continue to monitor the situation and plan additional responses. Through this shipment, Anera will be working with leading health partners such as International Medical Corps, the Jordanian Red Cross, and JMAP to provide critically needed medications, targeting vulnerable Jordanians as well as in-camp and out-of-camp refugees.

Anera is also conducting a national health needs assessment in order to better understand health priorities in the country and where Anera is well positioned to help address these needs. With this information, Anera will continue to engage donors from its medical donations program to garner more support for vulnerable Jordanians and the country’s refugee populations. Anera will prioritize shipments of vital PPE, medical supplies, and chronically needed medicines that are known to help mitigate COVID-19 symptoms or help to prevent serious patient illness due to the virus.

At this point in time, Anera does not foresee itself playing a role in vaccine distribution in Jordan. Anera is utilizing its membership in the Partnership for Quality Medical Donations network to closely monitor trends in vaccine distribution, in order to determine what role it may be able to play in the future. It is widely accepted that it is the duty of governments

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<sup>22</sup> [Jordan Labor Watch denounces an increase in child labor](#)

to vaccinate their populations in a timely and effective manner. For now, the Jordanian government's commendable efforts to inoculate its entire population, including the many refugees that it hosts, as well as Anera's still low-profile return to the country, suggest Anera will not be called upon to play a role on vaccines. However, we are assessing how we can contribute to vaccine messaging, in the same way the organization is doing in Lebanon.