Virus cases surge in Iran, Jordan, Morocco: WHO

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Iran, Jordan and Morocco have recorded thousands of new COVID-19 infections in recent days, the World Health Organization said Thursday, warning that lockdowns could not stamp out the pandemic.

"More than 60 percent of all cases in the past week were reported from three countries—the Islamic Republic of Iran, Jordan and Morocco," WHO's regional director Ahmed Al-Mandhari said in a virtual press conference.

"Several other countries continue to see an increase in cases, including Lebanon and Pakistan. Countries that reported the largest increase in deaths included Jordan, Tunisia, and Lebanon."

To date, the region covering 22 countries from Morocco to Pakistan has registered some 3.6 million cases, out of a global total of 55 million.

But Mandhari warned that official case numbers in the region likely fall far short of the reality.

"We believe the actual number of confirmed cases across the region to be even higher, and the recent trends remain highly concerning," he said.

He stressed the need for a comprehensive approach to managing the pandemic, with targeted lockdowns and strict adherence to personal preventive measures.

"The increases we are seeing now are clearly a result of the easing of lockdown and restrictions, which succeeded in controlling the pandemic in our region in July and August," he said.

"But lockdowns can only limit transmission to a certain extent."

In Iran, which has seen more than 43,000 deaths out of over 815,000 reported cases since the start of the pandemic, the daily number of confirmed infections is hovering at around 13,000, according to official figures.

Tehran has announced between 400-500 deaths a day for several weeks.

Morocco on Wednesday passed the grim milestone of 5,000 total deaths from the COVID-19 illness, with over 306,000 cases since March, and around 5,000 new cases announced every day.

Jordan meanwhile is recording around 8,000 cases per day, with over 163,000 since the start of the pandemic.

Tunisia, which has seen over 83,000 COVID-19 cases, is currently recording some 1,400 new infections and around 100 deaths per day, with November likely to see a record number of coronavirus deaths.

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