



# Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) Update #06



8 May 2020

## Overview

The Government of Nepal (GoN) extended the nation-wide lockdown until 18 May, maintaining the closure of all points of entry and restricting domestic and international flights until 31 May. This is the fifth consecutive extension of the lockdown since 24 March 2020.

A total of 101 COVID-19 positive cases have been confirmed in Nepal. Among those, 22 have recovered and 79 are undergoing treatment, no deaths have been reported. A large proportion of cases (31) have been identified in Province One, and in Nepalgunj of Province 5 (17 total cases, 15 new cases on 3 May). A total of 14,096 were tested using RT-PCR method and 52,970 Rapid Diagnostic Tests (RDT) were conducted across the country. There are currently 136 people in isolation and 19,734 in quarantine sites nationwide.

The Government has conceptualized the second phase of its COVID-19 relief program, focusing on cash/food-for-work for workers, loan offers to businesses, extension of tax payment deadlines and continuation of previously announced rebates on utility bills. As per the scheme, informal sector workers who have lost employment because of COVID-19 will receive cash or food in exchange for labour in the public works of federal, provincial and local governments. The government has directed formal sector employers to pay 50% of the salaries of their workers – accrued from the beginning of the lockdown until mid-May – and gradually pay the remaining 50% once business has resumed. To tackle employment creation at the local level, the Prime Minister’s Employment Fund, Prime Minister’s Agriculture Modernization Project, and COVID-19 Response Fund established at federal, provincial and local levels are to be mobilized.

Amid COVID-19 response activities, on 4 May a meeting of the Inter-Governmental Council was held to discuss preparations for the upcoming federal, provincial and local budgets. It was agreed to focus on economic revitalization and employment generation at the local level. Furthermore, the National Planning Commission (NPC) is coordinating a government study on the social and economic impacts of COVID-19 in Nepal. The study, which is to inform national recovery plans and programmes, focusses on 14 different sectors including, public health and education services, poverty, inequality and social exclusion, migration, micro economy and tourism, among others.

The Humanitarian Country Team (HCT) and the UN Resident Coordinator continue to engage with the government at both strategic and operational levels, both federally and provincially, in order to address the findings of the quarantine site assessment.



Health Cluster

Ministry of Health and Population (MoHP) has recently endorsed two guidelines/SOPs: “Hazard allowance guidelines for the management of COVID-19 cases- 2076” to support health personnel involved in COVID-19 response, and “Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) of cleaning and decontamination of the ambulance used in COVID-19”. As a part of surge support MoHP has deployed three member teams in each province to support provincial teams in the ongoing COVID-19 response, coordination and monitoring efforts. Laboratory testing of COVID-19 through polymerase chain reaction (PCR) testing has been scaled up to 18 locations across the country, with at least one laboratory in each province. Mental health and reproductive health (RH) sub-clusters

are actively providing relevant COVID-19 response support in their respective areas to MoHP. Support to COVID-19 hospitals, fever clinics and isolation centres continues. A child and adolescent mental health clinic run by Kanti Children Hospital provided clinical and psychosocial management support to 68 children (47 boys and 21 girls aged under 18 years) and 49 parents. Routine immunization and maternal and new-born services resumed in many health facilities in Provinces Two, Five, Karnali and Sudurpaschim.

**As of 06 May 2020**

Total testing sites: **18** (newly added Provincial Public Health Laboratory, Biratnagar and Karnali Academy of Health Sciences)

Total PCR tests completed: **14,096**

Total PCR positive results: **101**

Total active cases: **79**

Total discharged: **22**

Total isolation beds: 29,83

Total people in isolation: 136

Total quarantine beds: 49,764

Total people in quarantine: 19,734

The RH sub-cluster is finalizing a detailed rollout plan for the interim technical guidance on reproductive, maternal, newborn, child and adolescent health (RMNCAH), which is awaiting endorsement. The nation-wide training rollout will require multi-partner financing and support. While rapid assessment and regular maternal neonatal health monitoring data continues to show low utilization of services at health facilities, the number of clients accessing the helpline for sexual and reproductive health (SRH) services operated by RH partners totalled more than 1,000 in the past week. Currently, in addition to the MoHP helpline for COVID-19, RH sub-cluster partners have initiated helpline services, including toll free numbers for regular provision of counselling and information on safe motherhood, family planning and safe abortion services. Risk communication messages around COVID-19, specially focusing on pregnancy, new-born danger signs and breastfeeding are also being prepared. In addition, concerns around shortages of life saving medicines, such as oxytocin and misoprostol remain, requiring support for timely procurement and supplies.



**Protection Cluster**

6,240 calls were received through the Child Helpline of which 210 cases were related to relief assistance, 26 cases to child abandonment or neglect, children in need of alternative care arrangements, child marriage, trafficking, child labour, cyber abuse, children living on the street, family conflict and psychosocial problems. The remaining cases were related to general information on COVID-19. Cases were referred as appropriate and follow-up is ongoing. A survey on the evolution of internet usage was conducted to assess the current vulnerability of youth to online violence and exposure to harmful content. 15% of respondents received sexual messages from strangers online and only 45% knew at least three quarters of their online friends in real life. Based on these findings, targeted messaging is being developed for parents and children on the impact of online violence and ways to identify risk factors and protect children. Since the lockdown 172

cybercrimes have been reported, representing 48% of last year's total reported cybercrimes. The majority of the reports were around fake IDs/ impersonation on Facebook in order to post harmful content. Monitoring of risks of sexual exploitation on Twitter and Facebook continues in collaboration with the Nepal Police. Messages on online safety reached more than two million parents and young people who were particularly targeted through social media. These posts generated more than 1.3 million engagements.



### Food Security Cluster

Data processing and analysis of the nationally sampled household food security survey is underway. The report should be available by mid-May. Nepal Food Security Monitoring System (NeKSAP), a joint initiative of MoALD and WFP, published COVID-19 mVAM Market Update # 2 last week, covering the market situation from 15-21 April 2020. Major highlights include: prices of basic food commodities, monitored in 15 major markets across the country, increased marginally compared to the first week of March; however, a notable rise was recorded for vegetable and fruit prices. Meanwhile, the price of food staples continued to be significantly higher in Karnali Province compared to other parts of Nepal, although in line with the seasonal trend. Due to the COVID-19 crisis, demand for commodities in markets across Nepal is low and declining, as reported by a majority of interviewed traders. As a result of low demand and insufficient availability of commodities in large parts of the country, households in these areas may face challenges in securing adequate food and essential items, if the current situation continues.

Information from 712 local governments across the country on ongoing food relief distribution for daily wage workers and vulnerable families during the lockdown has been collected. As of 5 May, local governments have identified 1.781 million households as 'most affected' and distributed relief packages to 1.362 million households (76%). The distribution is ongoing. As the lockdown continues, additional distributions are being considered by local governments. Further, the cabinet made some amendments to the immediate relief programme on 27 April for different sectors. For food relief, this amendment has shifted the modality from unconditional to conditional. Now, daily wage workers identified as unemployed must be engaged in public works implemented by federal, provincial or local governments to qualify for assistance, which will be provided by local governments in the form of in-kind or cash remuneration. Temporary employment opportunities will be made available through the Prime Minister's Employment Programme, Prime Minister's Agriculture Modernization Programme, and local governments' development programmes. Some local governments have begun to implement this decision. The Municipal Association of Nepal and National Association of Rural Municipalities in Nepal have raised some concerns regarding the conditional relief package, as there is insufficient public work and budget to provide wage labour employment for a large number of daily wage workers and significant challenges to maintaining health and safety measures, including physical distancing in urban municipalities. Some FSC members have distributed in-kind and cash-based food assistance to vulnerable households in coordination with respective local governments and have plans to provide in-kind/cash-based assistance as well. FSC is updating the 3Ws regularly.



### WASH Cluster

Over 15 WASH cluster members are supporting more than 60 districts of all seven provinces. As of 6 May, 27 health care facilities, eight isolation centres and some quarantine centres of more than

thirty districts have received minimum WASH supplies and cleaning/disinfection items. Further, cluster members are supporting to ensure water supply, sanitation and hygiene facilities. At health care facilities across the country, cluster members have provided soaps (4,094), hand sanitizers (1,578), hygiene kits (273) buckets and mugs (252), water purifiers (111,600 tablets), gloves (1,054), masks (2,968), bleaching powders (115kgs) and other cleaning and disinfection items. Similarly, support to isolation centres include: hygiene kits (242), buckets/jerrycans (211), and water purifiers (340 sachets). At quarantine centres cluster members provided soap (4,617), sanitizers (590), hygiene kits (593), buckets (1,668), bleaching powder (50kgs) and other personal protection and cleaning items.

At community/household level, WASH cluster members have provided items such as soap (16,278), sanitizers (2,050), hygiene kits (6,521), water purifiers (72,000 tablets), masks (4,762) and gloves (2,400). In addition, cluster members have supported the establishment of a total of 68 hand washing stations in strategic areas of communities. An assessment of WASH facilities at health care facilities is ongoing. The WASH cluster has designated provincial cluster support agencies in all provinces to support the smooth functioning of the provincial WASH coordination system. Five agencies have volunteered to support provincial WASH teams in coordination and information management.



### Nutrition Cluster

The nutrition cluster has developed an action plan for service monitoring based on the nutrition information system (NIS) which has been endorsed by the cluster. According to the action plan, NIS will be implemented in 20 districts in the first phase and expanded nationwide through a number of phases over the coming 1.5 months. Nutrition cluster is providing support to air messages on nutrition for pregnant and lactating mothers and under five children in the context of COVID-19 on 32 local radio stations across all provinces. Provincial medical stores of Sudurpaschim Province transported 110 cartons of RUTF to Doti, Bajura and Baitadi districts. Similarly, Karnali Province transported 60 cartons of RUTF from provincial medical stores to Humla and Rukum districts. Province One, transported five carton each to Khotang and Panchthar districts. UNICEF supported the transportation cost of these supplies to the provincial medical stores. Provincial health directorates and logistics management centres continue the distribution of super cereal plus in five districts of Karnali Province and Solukhumbu district of Province One, targeting 6-23-month-old children and pregnant and lactating women.



### Shelter Cluster

The Department of Urban Development and Building Construction (DUDBC) is regularly coordinating with other line ministries to ensure better collaboration in the COVID-19 response. Custer member provided non-food items (NFIs) in Province Two and Karnali Province, providing NFI (blanket, beds, mattress etc.) to more than 7,000 people. So far, 341 tents, 1,134 tarpaulins, 8,523 blankets, 2,525 mosquito nets, 1,595 mattresses and 350 hygiene kits have been distributed over the week in different quarantine sites across the country. Following findings from the rapid assessment of quarantine sites, the Shelter Cluster meeting of 28 April covered how cluster members can provide support to ensure quality and minimum services in quarantine sites. As an action point from the cluster

meeting, a task team has been formed to develop a checklist of services to be considered in the establishment of quarantine sites and design IEC poster to be provided to all municipal authorities. The team is developing the materials based on the quarantine management guideline of the government. This guideline will be shared with all cluster leads and concerned authorities for further inputs and materials will be finalized and circulated to municipalities based on these inputs.



### Education Cluster

Airing of education specific PSAs continues reaching approximately 730,000 students through 34 local FM stations in 18 districts. In addition, PSAs on how teachers and parents can help children tackle psychosocial issues, a PSA for children with disabilities and PSAs targeting teachers are being aired through local FM stations. The Centre for Education and Human Resource Development (CEHRD) is monitoring the continuation of children's learning through distance education using different media (televisions, radio, online digital platforms and social media). CEHRD has launched a learning portal that has been accessed by 460 users with 1,680 views as of 5 May. The recorded television lessons are uploaded to a YouTube channel with a reach of 4.8 million. Radio learning classes for grades 1-10 continue in Banke district. CEHRD has issued guidance to Ministries of Social Developments of all provinces, as well as all local governments, for printing and dissemination of self-learning materials developed by Education Cluster for pre-primary to grade 3. Printing of self-learning materials is in progress; however, distribution will remain a challenge due to the prolonged lockdown. Education Cluster has updated the federal level Education Cluster Contingency Plan, which is in the process of gaining endorsement from the government. The Province Two Education Cluster is supporting the development of district level education contingency plans in all districts.



### Logistics Cluster

The Logistics Cluster transported 0.5 MT of medical supplies for the Health Directorate to Butwal on 4 May. The Humanitarian Staging Area (HSA) received 15MT of medical supplies of MoHP. The Logistics Cluster will support MoHP in kit packing of these supplies before transporting them to the provinces. The Ministry of Finance (MoF) has extended customs exemptions for all medical items and health equipment directly related to the COVID-19 response. The duty-free status will last until the end of May. The Logistics Cluster faces challenges in responding to requests for transportation of small volumes of goods, which is not cost effective. Some NGOs have had to wait until there is enough cargo for a single destination for a full truckload.



### Socio-Economic/Early Recovery Cluster

The Socio-Economic and Early Recovery cluster is continuing to conduct discussions with the Ministry of Federal Affairs and General Administration (MOFAGA) and the National Planning Commission (NPC), on the formalization of the new cluster's terms of reference with the government. Discussions have centred around the formation of a core steering group that will serve as a clearing house for information and decisions, and the need to align with all government mechanisms including the High-Level Committee on COVID-19 and the Ministry of Finance's 3R mechanism. SERC also

met with MoFAGA this week regarding the potential assistance to local governments in building a rapid assessment tool that will enable local COVID-19 response planning.



### **Risk Communication and Community Engagement**

U-Report Nepal has been launched in Viber as a chatbot in English and Nepali languages, providing life-saving information on COVID-19 in an interactive way to engage the young population of the country. Around 18.4 million people have been reached through social media channels with various messages on COVID-19. The COVID-19 call centre received 14,976 calls, of which 47% were responded; among callers seeking information on COVID-19, 45% called to enquire about the current status of COVID-19 in Nepal. The majority of calls were received from Sudurpashchim (33%) followed by Bagmati Province (22%). In addition to information on COVID-19, radio and television programmes also focus on socio-economic matters, psychosocial and learning related issues like increased care burden among women, issues faced by marginalized groups on accessing relief, domestic violence, impact of COVID-19 on informal sector workers, challenges of female health workers and female migrant workers, online education, education alternatives, mental health and continuation of essential health services.

Around 104,364 households were reached with COVID-19 related information via telephone, 120,971 subscribers with SMS messaging on emergency nutrition and 1,163,726 households with SMS messaging on continuing agricultural work during lockdown. RCCE workstream members continue supporting the media centre and health emergency operation centre (HEOC) of MoHP in message development, integration of RCCE principles and delivery of daily telecasts. On 4 May, the COVID-19 telecast briefing highlighted the importance of rational use of PPE. Further, RCCE members supported MoHP to strengthen dedicated COVID-19 portal by harmonizing data flow between entities of MoHP and DoHS. A total of 22 senior leaders of MoHP and DoHS have been trained on the principles of crisis and risk communication. RCCE workstream members also reached around 11,400 women users with messages highlighting socio-economic impact of COVID-19 on women and marginalized communities through Viber.



### **Inter-Agency Gender Working Group**

An NGO recorded 128 cases of violence against women and girls during the first month of lockdown across 15 districts of Nepal. Local governments and NGOs continued support women and girls who experience and wish to report violence, resumption of services for maternal and pregnant women and continued provision of hotline and referral services for women experiencing violence. Women for Human Rights, a single women's group, is currently operating a food kitchen in Ward 3 in Kathmandu to provide meals for around 1,500 women, children, and people from vulnerable groups. There are plans for the expansion of the service to cover other areas. The Ministry of Women, Children, and Senior Citizens (MoWCSC) is in the process of finalizing the Gender Equality and Social Inclusion Profile for COVID-19 Response and Preparedness.



### **Cash Coordination Group (CCG)**

The CCG has agreed on the ‘minimum expenditures basket (MEB)’ and its transfer value. A ‘MEB’ is defined as what a household requires in order to meet its essential needs, on a regular or seasonal basis, and its average cost. It is a monetary threshold – the cost of these essential goods, utilities, services and resources, typically for one month. Based on an expenditure-based approach and using the latest Annual Household Survey (2016/17) and Nepal Living Standard Survey 2011, the MEB is calculated as NRS 115 per person per day. This implies that MEB includes required inflation, food consumption scores and other considerations, and has been calculated using 30-50 decile group households. Multipurpose cash transfer value is set at 80% of MEB that is NPR 90 per person per day. This transfer value does not cover those with special needs, for example children, PLW, people with disabilities, etc. These needs should be covered by program design. Furthermore, discussions are ongoing on multi-purpose cash assistance (MPCA) and un-conditional cash transfers to meet the basic needs of COVID-19 affected populations. Similarly, CCG is discussing the uses of cash for work and voucher modality in these situations. The CCG has been concentrating its efforts through lobbying and advocating with different channels of the government to promoting MPCA as a best modality.

**For further information, please contact the UN Resident Coordinator’s Office:**

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