

COVID-19 Pandemic: Saudi Arabia's Role at National and International Levels

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The novel Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome Coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2) also called COVID-19 emerged in December 2019 and swiftly spread worldwide.¹ The COVID-19 pandemic has posed a great risk to global health system and economy.² As of April 17, 2020, it involved 213 countries and territories and has infected 2 078 605 people with a mortality rate of 139 515 (6.71%).³

The COVID-19 has variable biological and epidemiological features and is highly contagious. It infected a large group of people in a shorter period compared to Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome Coronavirus 1 (SARS-CoV-1) and Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS-CoV). However, the mortality rate of MERS-CoV was higher than SARS-CoV and COVID-19.¹

Saudi Arabia is home to approximately 33.7 million people.⁴ On April 16, 2020, there are total 5862 COVID-19 confirmed cases with mortality rate of 79 (1.34%).³ The maximum number of cases has been reported from the capital city, Riyadh 1700, and the number of cases from other major cities including Makkah Al-Mukarma 1584, Madina Al-Munawara 1226, Jeddah 1132, Dammam 399, Alhafof 203, Tabuk 113, and Alkhobar 47⁵ (Figure 1). The number of cases from the various regions of Saudi Arabia indicate a smaller risk associated with the pandemic event.

COVID-19

The government of Saudi Arabia took early preventive measures against COVID-19. Saudi Arabia implemented policies of: availability of personal protective equipments, stay-at-home, social distancing, and quality hospital care to the people. In the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, the prevalence of diabetes mellitus is about 31%,⁶ and COVID-19 is swiftly spread and affecting the old age people with coronary artery diseases and diabetes mellitus.³ The government understand the severity of the COVID-19 pandemics and common diseases in the region including diabetes mellitus. Hence, patients were called on telephones and treatment was provided door to door through a speedy courier system.

The government has cancelled all international flights, also attempted to minimize large gatherings from March 23, 2020. These early preventive measures minimized the

pandemic peak and number of cases from the country. Saudi Arabia handled the coronavirus pandemics by taking vigilant preventive measures on time to ensure the safety of citizens and residents.

The state is already providing free high-quality treatment to their citizens. Moreover, the government also announced free treatment to all the COVID-19 patients in all public and private sector health care institutes in Saudi Arabia. King Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud issued an order for special health facilities to the citizens and residents even those in violation of residency laws. There were combined efforts from multiple government entities to test and treat in coping with pandemics.⁷

In addition, the government of Saudi Arabia launched a huge research grant portal for COVID-19. The King Abdulaziz City for Science and Technology announced a submission of fast track research funding path with each grant providing a minimum of 500 000 SR, equal to 133 000/USD.⁸ These research grants aim to engage scientists and researchers to fight against COVID-19.⁸

In addition, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is also playing a role at international levels to fight against COVID-19. In response to World Health Organization's (WHO) appeal,

Saudi Arabia donated a generous amount of US\$10 million to fight against COVID-19. Another US\$10 million were also donated to Yemen to provide equipment and supplies as part of Yemen's national readiness and response plan.⁹

As per WHO advise, Saudi Arabia transferred the medical supplies from WHO's hub in Dubai to Aden, Yemen. The shipment included personal protective items for medical workers, laboratory screening tests, medicine, and were distributed to Sana'a and Aden to protect the people from COVID-19. Saudi Arabia also delivered a shipment of medical equipment to Wuhan city in China.⁹

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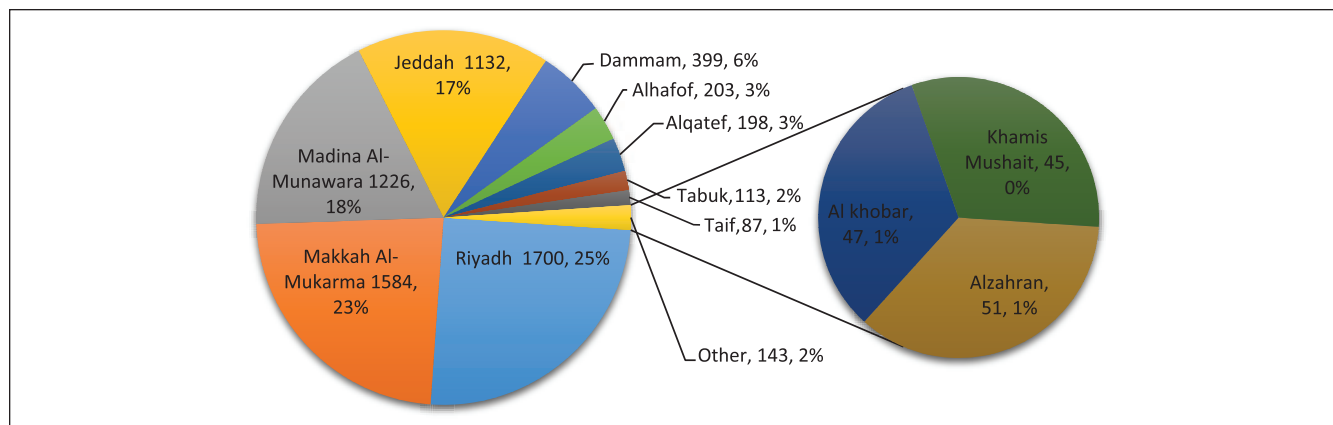


Figure 1. COVID-19 cases in the various cities of Saudi Arabia.

The Saudi officials are working very hard with all possible sources. The state on humanitarian ground is supporting both regional and international communities to prevent COVID-19 pandemics.

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