

**Call for Papers - Laboratory diagnostics responses to emerging infectious diseases (including COVID-19 pandemic) and preparedness for future pandemics in WHO Eastern Mediterranean Region**

The World Health Organization (WHO) Regional Office for the Eastern Mediterranean Region (EMRO) in collaboration with Influenza and Other Respiratory Viruses Journal are pleased to announce a call for full manuscripts on *Laboratory diagnostics responses to emerging infectious diseases (including the COVID-19 pandemic), and preparedness for future pandemics in WHO Eastern Mediterranean Region*. The papers will be published to special issue of Influenza and Other Respiratory Viruses Journal. This collection of special issue papers will be guest edited by Dr Laith J. Abu-Raddad, Professor of Population Health Sciences at Weill Cornell Medicine - Qatar, Cornell University; Dr John W McCauley, formerly Director of Worldwide Influenza Centre, The Francis Crick Institute, UK and Dr. Maria Van Kerkhove, COVID-19 Technical Lead and Emerging Diseases and Zoonoses Unit Head, WHO, Switzerland.

The WHO/ Eastern Mediterranean Region (EMR) comprises the occupied Palestinian territory and twenty-one Member States: Afghanistan, Bahrain, Djibouti, Egypt, Iran, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Oman, Pakistan, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Somalia, Sudan, Syrian Arab Republic, Tunisia, United Arab Emirates and Yemen. The provision of health and other services in this region remains challenging due to acute and protracted humanitarian emergencies, poverty, lack of political commitment and fragile health systems (1). Most of these countries have experienced recurring emerging infectious disease outbreaks in recent year, besides the COVID-19 pandemic. The laboratory diagnosis for high threat pathogens plays an important role in the preparedness and response to the epidemic and pandemic of emerging infectious diseases.

Undeniably therefore, in some countries, especially at the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, Polymerase Chain Reaction (PCR) testing capacity which was crucial for Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome Coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2) testing (2) was not available in many countries in the region before the pandemic. However, in response to the pandemic, the existing national laboratory-based surveillance systems were rapidly adapted to daily monitor the epidemiological situation of SARS-CoV-2. At the start of the COVID-19 epidemic in early 2020, diagnostic testing for SARS-CoV-2 in all Member States was exclusively limited to the National Influenza Center (NICs) and other Influenza laboratories, but with the rapid increase in the number of COVID-19 cases, the ability to leverage existing laboratories' capacities in diagnostic testing and to increase the number of people being tested became critical. The national authorities extended testing facilities to include other public sectors, academia, and private sector laboratories.

As the COVID-19 pandemic evolved, genomic surveillance activities were also increased by laboratories in the Region as this has become a key component of public health efforts throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. Towards this, WHO EMRO in collaboration with other partner organizations mobilized support for the continued establishment of PCR testing capacity at national and subnational national levels by providing equipment, testing kits, and personal protective equipment for laboratory staff, in addition to deploying experts to train on molecular diagnostic techniques. The PCR and sequencing capacities were leveraged to support other emerging infectious diseases in all countries, and many countries are able to

perform PCR and sequencing with other pathogens. With the continued rapid expansion in laboratory diagnostics during the COVID-19 pandemic, especially with regards to the enhancement of PCR capacity and genomic sequencing (3,4) in countries of the Region, it is important to document the best practices and take advantage of the numerous lessons learned from precious (5,6) and this current outbreak, as Member States streamline their health system processes to prioritize effective preparedness for future pandemics. This will additionally require a reframing of priorities, accountability, continued strong country-level leadership, coordination and ownership of all aspects of response.

Therefore, papers submitted to this special issue should consist of laboratory diagnostics preparedness and response to the emerging infectious disease, including COVID-19 pandemic in the EMR, in addition to but not limited to showcasing various approaches utilized prior to and during the pandemic to facilitate response, discuss future implications of this experience and more. Submissions (original research articles, case studies, qualitative research, evaluation studies, evidence synthesis and reviews etc.) are particularly encouraged to deliberate over areas such in-country laboratory preparedness and response, national strategies to scale up access to COVID-19 testing, use of innovative diagnostics technologies like Ag RDTs and genomic sequencing, integrated surveillance of influenza, SARS-CoV-2, RSV and other respiratory viruses, accelerating priority research and innovation; policy engagement and expert support; biosafety and security; etc. within the overall scope of high impact respiratory pathogens in the Region. Submissions are expected to also highlight the challenges faced, opportunities for sustainability, and integrated systems addressing but not limited to health system readiness, leadership, public trust in COVID-19 response, and more.

*Word limit:* 5,000 words maximum (including tables, figures, and references). Abstract should be limited to 250 words maximum and structured into the following sections: Background, Methods, Results and Conclusions of potential submissions. Interested authors should consult the journal's guidelines for manuscript submissions at

<https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/page/journal/17502659/homepage/forauthors.html>

All submissions will be subject to a blinded peer-review process and must adhere to Influenza and Other Respiratory Viruses Journal guidelines. Final decisions regarding acceptance/revision/rejection will be based on the reviews received from the reviewers and at the sole discretion of the Editor-in-Chief. No publication fees will be charged from the authors for the articles accepted for final publication. The issue is expected to be published by mid of 2023. Please submit your manuscripts and any other queries to: [emrlaboratorydiagnostics@gmail.com](mailto:emrlaboratorydiagnostics@gmail.com). The deadline for the receipt of articles will be **15<sup>th</sup> February 2023**.

#### **About the Guest Editors:**

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