



The Fight Against COVID-19 in the Palestinian Authority (Updated to April 19, 2020)

April 20, 2020

Overview

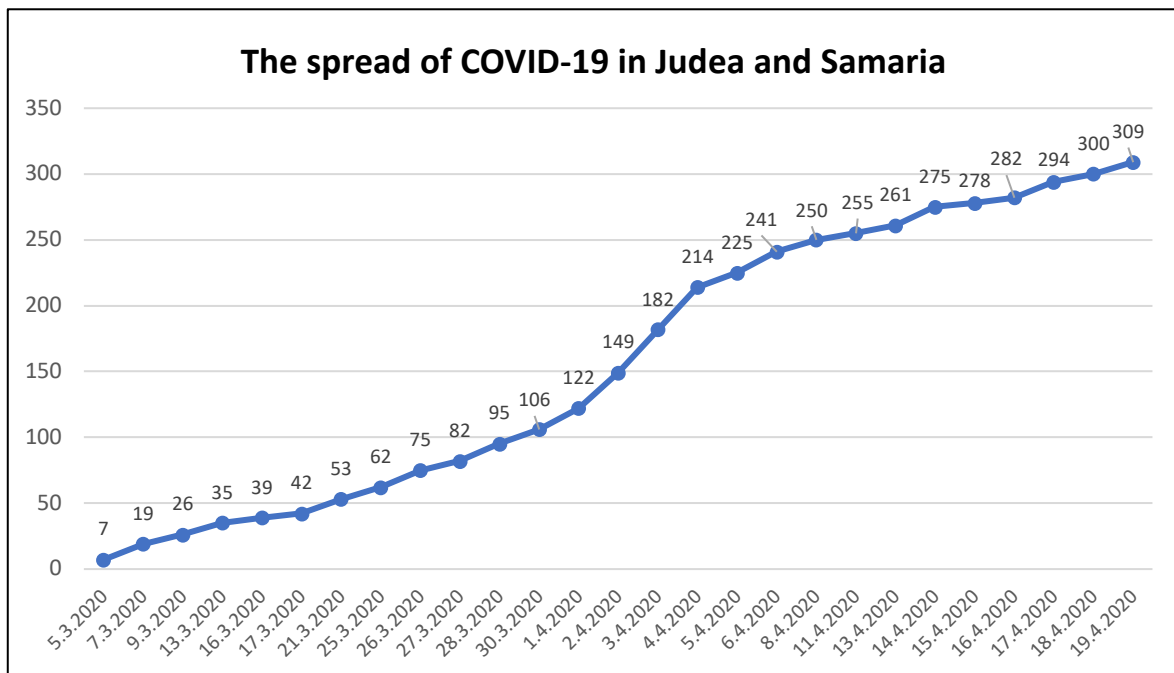
► The main developments in the fight against the spread of COVID-19 in Judea and Samaria are the following:

- ◆ According to reports from the Palestinian Authority (PA), **this past week the number of COVID-19 cases rose to 309** (259 last week). That is a relatively moderate increase in the number of cases and apparently so far the spread of the virus is under control.
- ◆ The largest number of cases is in the **towns and villages surrounding Jerusalem** (the PA's Jerusalem district) **and in the districts of Ramallah and Bethlehem** (83% of the cases), followed by the **Hebron district (11%)**. The other cases are spread throughout the various districts without significant hotspots in any one of them.
- ◆ **In east Jerusalem the number of cases has risen.** The number of reported cases is **between 126 (Palestinian sources and an estimate from the Israeli Jerusalem municipality) and 111 (the PA report)**. The **ITIC does not have reliable data** about the distribution of local cases. Reports in the Palestinian media indicate that there are COVID-19 cases in most of the east Jerusalem neighborhoods.
- ◆ The PA recently published "transmission trees" of the infection in Bethlehem and a number of villages. They indicate that **a significant percentage of patients were infected by members of their own families. That was because of the lack of effective in-house isolation (due to crowding and a tribal/clan lifestyle)**. The data contradicts the PA's smear campaign accusing Israel of [allegedly] deliberately spreading the disease by means of Palestinian workers returning to their homes, thus undermining the PA's fight against the virus.
- ◆ **The PA continues preparing for the Muslim religious month of Ramadan.** The ministry of Muslim endowments banned public prayers on the Temple Mount. The minister of the economy announced there was no need for concern over food supplies because the PA had reserves sufficient for six months.

- ◆ **The PA's smear campaign against Israel continues** to accompany the fight against COVID-19. Israel is accused of [alleged] medical negligence, [allegedly] deliberately causing the virus to spread to the PA territories and east Jerusalem. The PA also alleges that Israel's policy threatens the lives of the Palestinian terrorists in Israeli jails.

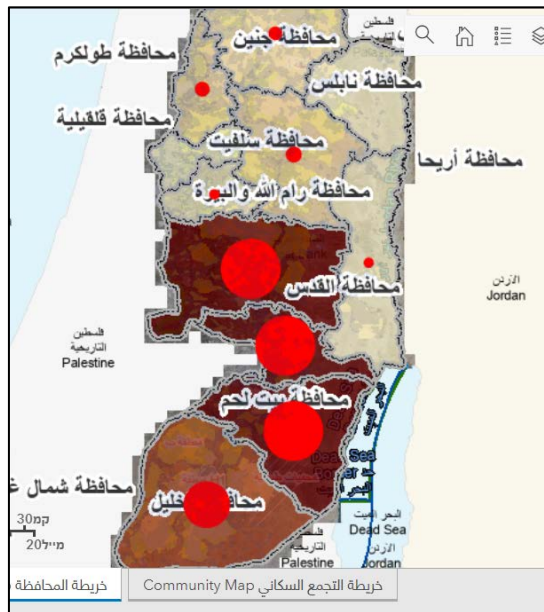
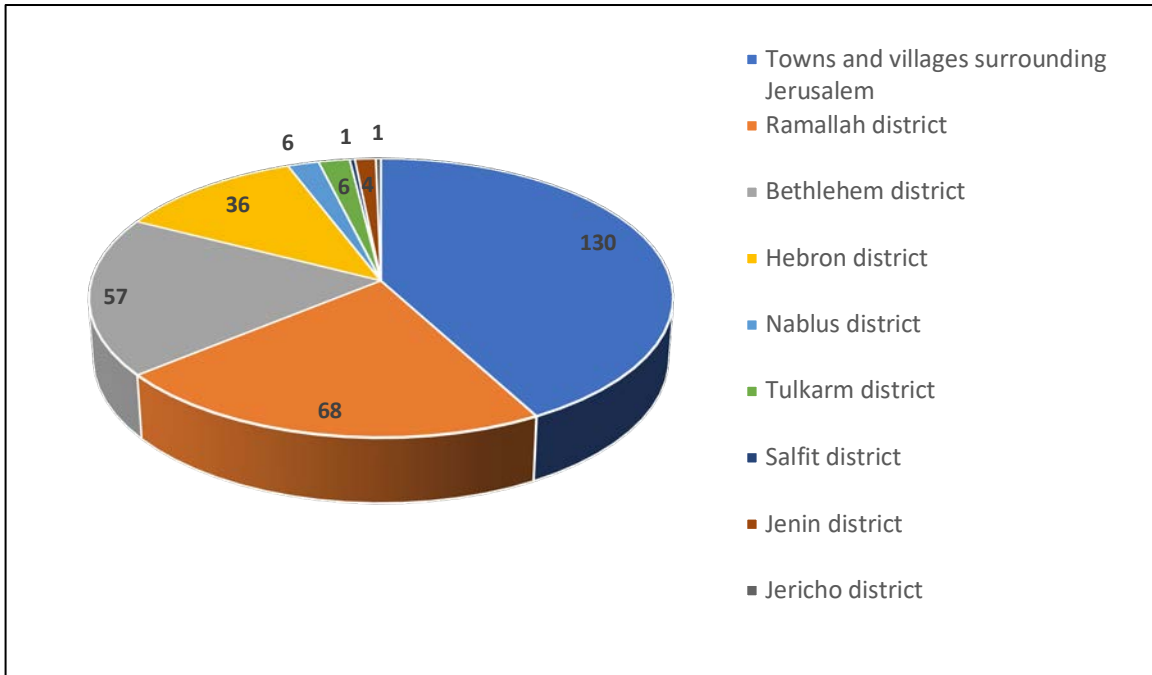
The Extent of COVID-19 Infection in Judea and Samaria

According to PA reports, **the number of COVID-19 cases in Judea and Samaria has risen to 309** (April 19, 2020) from 259 (April 13, 2020). So far, **two Palestinians have died** of the disease and **69 have recovered** (Twitter account of Ibrahim Melhem, PA government spokesman, Ma'an, April 19, 2020). According to the PA minister of health, the condition of all the patients is stable and **none is in serious or critical condition** (Ma'an, April 16 and 18, 2020).



Geographic distribution of COVID-19 cases

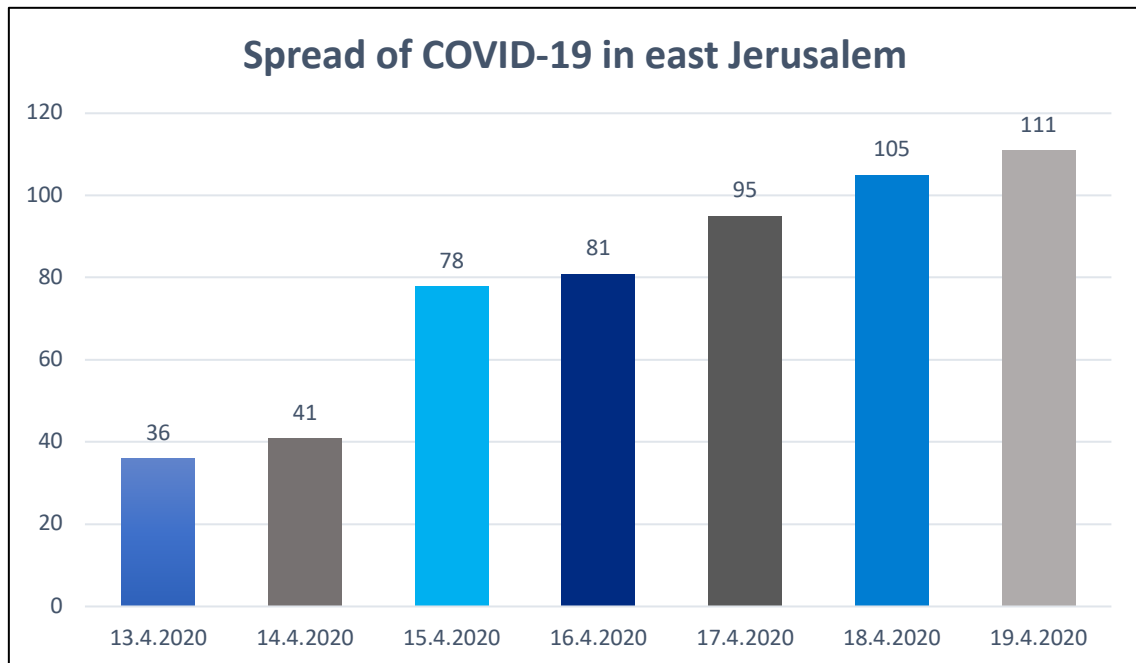
► The hotspots of COVID-19 infection **are still in the towns and villages surrounding Jerusalem (the PA's Jerusalem district) as well as in the Ramallah and Bethlehem districts**. Those three districts account for 83% of all cases. They are followed by the Hebron district, where there was a sharp increase in the number of cases (34, or 11% of all cases, up from 24 last week). In other districts, the incidence of infection is localized: Nablus (six cases), Tulkarm (six), Jenin (four), Jericho (one) and Salfit (one) (Corona Map portal, April 19, 2020).



COVID-19 hotspots in Judea and Samaria (Corona Map portal, April 19, 2020).

Increase in Infection in East Jerusalem

► The Israeli Jerusalem municipality and the Palestinian media estimate the number of COVID-19 cases in east Jerusalem at 126. However, Ibrahim Melhem, PA government spokesman, reported that the number rose to 111 on April 19, up from 36 on April 13 (Ibrahim Melhem's Twitter account, April 14-19, 2020).



► At this point the ITIC does not have reliable data about the distribution of infection in the east Jerusalem neighborhoods. **Dr. Hazem Ruwaydi, from the doctors' committee in Silwan, reported the number of COVID-19 cases in Jerusalem as 126.** He said they were scattered **among most of the city's neighborhoods**, including Silwan, Bayt Hanina, Bayt Safafa, Sur Baher, Jabal Mukaber, a-Tor, Issawiya, Shuafat, Sawana and Wadi Joz. He said most of the patients were quarantined at home, and the few in hospitals were in stable condition (silwanic.net website, April 18, 2018).

► The following are additional reports on infection in east Jerusalem, as reported by the Palestinian media:

- ◆ East Jerusalem photojournalist Muhammad Qarout reported **the death of an aged female COVID-19 patient in the Issawiya neighborhood.** He reported **close to ten COVID-19 cases in the neighborhood** (Facebook page of Muhammad Qarout, April 18, 2020). Muhammad Abu al-Homes, a member of Issawiya's monitoring committee, said more than eight people were ill with COVID-19 in Issawiya and there was concern the number would grow (Facebook page of the silwanic.net website, April 19, 2020).

- ◆ On April 19, 2020, **four COVID-19 patients were reported in the Silwan neighborhood.** They are quarantined at home (Facebook page of the silwanic.net website, April 19, 2020). Other websites reported that the number of patients in Silwan had **risen to 53** and the number in [east] Jerusalem to **130** (Ma'an, April 19, 2020).

- ◆ The branch offices of the Fatah movement in the Qalandia refugee camp and the villages of Aqab and Samiramis announced that **the number of cases in the area had risen to 60**. A lockdown was therefore imposed on the refugee camp and the village of Aqab by means of an earthwork barrier and concrete blocks (al-Bayadar al-Siyasi, April 19, 2020).
- ▶ On April 18, 2020, an Eastern Orthodox Christian Holy Fire¹ ceremony was held at the Church of the Holy Sepulcher in the Christian Quarter of Jerusalem, attended by the Patriarch of the Greek Orthodox Church and a handful of clerics. However, after the ceremony, Christian celebrants took lit torches and candles out of the church and passed through the alleys of the Old City in violation of the procedures against gatherings instituted by the Israeli ministry of health. The Palestinian media reported that the Israeli police gave tickets to those who violated the procedures (Ma'an, April 18 and 19, 2020).



Christians celebrate the Holy Fire in the Christian Quarter of the Old City, gathering in violation of the procedures instituted by the Israeli ministry of health (Ma'an, April 18, 2020).

Sources of infection

The PA recently published transmission trees of the COVID-19 infection in a number of villages in Judea and Samaria and in the city of Bethlehem. So far the PA has issued biased information linking the cases to infection from Israel within its smear campaign accusing Israel of spreading the disease. However, the transmission trees indicate that **a substantial number of the cases in Judea and Samaria were infected by members of their own families** (at least 64, or about 21% of all cases). In ITIC assessment the rate of infection among family members is even greater than what has been reported because of crowding and the tribal/clan lifestyles of many of the villages in Judea and Samaria.

¹ Holy Fire is a ceremony held by the Eastern Orthodox Church at the Church of the Holy Sepulcher on the Saturday before the Greek Orthodox Easter (Wikipedia).

- A number of examples of transmission trees published by the PA are the following:
- ◆ **The village of Bidu (northwest of Jerusalem):** So far **36 cases** have been reported. The epidemiological investigation showed that case number 66, which was diagnosed on March 26, 2020, **infected his mother** (case number 60). She was diagnosed a day before him and died of the disease. On the same day and on the following day his wife, his aunt's husband (who later infected the aunt) and a friend were infected. **The initial cases transmitted the disease to 13 more family members.** According to a report, case number 90 did not infect anyone and his quarantine was effective. The above (and other information) indicates **that 24 people were infected by family members, accounting for 47% of the COVID-19 cases diagnosed in the village.**
 - ◆ **The village of al-Jadira (north of Jerusalem):** Thirteen cases of COVID-19 were diagnosed in the village. The epidemiological investigation showed that case number 145 (a worker in the Atarot industrial zone north of Jerusalem) **transmitted the disease to his wife** (case number 187) on April 3. She transmitted it to her children, and they transmitted it to their wives. **The overwhelming majority of coronavirus cases in al-Jadira were transmissions within the same family.**
 - ◆ **The village of Artas (Bethlehem district):** Thirteen cases of COVID-19 were diagnosed in the village. The epidemiological investigation showed that the first case, number 86, transmitted the disease to his sons on March 27. Some of them were diagnosed the following day and some several days later (possibly because they were away from home at the time of the first transmission or began to develop symptoms at a later date). **In Artas as well, it can be seen that all the cases were transmitted by family members.**
 - ◆ **The city of Bethlehem:** The first cases of COVID-19 were diagnosed in Bethlehem, transmitted to local residents by infected Greek tourists. So far 56 cases have reportedly been diagnosed, of which 20 have recovered. Nineteen of 55 cases (with the exception of the transmitter), which make up 32% of the cases, began with exposure to the first transmitter of people who were infected by him and later infected the second circle. In the case of Bethlehem, **the first wave of cases was not the result of intra-family transmission, but from interpersonal relations or work with carriers who had been exposed to the Greek tourists.**

PA Preparations for Ramadan

- ▶ To prevent the spread of the virus, the Muslim *waqf* council decided to extend its fatwah **banning public prayers on the Temple Mount during the month of Ramadan**. The council called on all Muslims to pray at home (Wafa, April 16, 2020).
- ▶ **Khaled al-Asili, PA minister of the economy**, said **the PA's reserves of food are sufficient for six months and there is no reason to be worried regarding [the meals breaking the fast during] Ramadan**. He said the import of food continues, adding that the PA allows the delivery food and other merchandise between the districts. He added that his ministry designated seven types of foods which are subject to full ministry oversight to ensure reasonable prices and to prevent price gouging in the markets (Ma'an, April 16, 2020).

Additional PA Preventive Measures

- ▶ On April 16, 2020, PA Prime Minister Muhammad Shtayyeh called a meeting of all the district governors in his office in Ramallah. They gave him summaries of the COVID-19 situation in their various districts and the measures they were taking to combat it. He praised their activities and said public order should not suffer as a result of the crisis (Muhammad Shtayyeh's Facebook page, April 16, 2020).



PA Prime Minister Muhammad Shtayyeh meets with the district governors (Muhammad Shtayyeh's Facebook page, April 16, 2020).

- ▶ Some of the preventive measures taken by the PA during the past week were the following:
 - ◆ A full lockdown was imposed on the village of **Dura** (south of Hebron) to prevent the spread of the disease in the district (Wafa, April 15, 2020).



Imposing a full lockdown on Dura (Wafa, April 15, 2020)

- ◆ Stricter entrance and exit procedures were imposed on the village of **Ni'lin** (west of Ramallah) after one of the villagers was found to have COVID-19 (Wafa, April 15, 2020).



Ramping up COVID-19 security in Ni'lin (Wafa, April 15, 2020).

- ◆ **Issam Abu Bakr, governor of the Tulkarm district**, issued an order requiring all residents of the district to wear face masks and latex gloves beginning on April 16, 2020. The order will be enforced by the Palestinian police and [Fatah's] emergency committee (Ma'an, April 16, 2020).

The PA's Anti-Israel Smear Campaign

The PA, Fatah and various Palestinian organizations continue the anti-Israeli smear campaign which accompanies their fight against COVID-19. Israel is accused of [allegedly] employing a policy of "medical negligence" which caused the coronavirus to spread to east Jerusalem and Area C. They also allege that Israel is threatening the lives of the Palestinian prisoners.

- **Riyad Mansour, PA representative to the UN**, sent a communiqué to the UN secretary general, the president of the Security Council and the president of the General Assembly protesting Israel's conduct during the PA's fight against COVID-19. He mentioned the so-called

"Israel's threats" to annex the West Bank and the detentions Israel carries out in Judea and Samaria. He also related to the issue of the Palestinian [terrorist] prisoners in Israeli jails, accusing Israel of [alleged] medical negligence (Ma'an, April 16, 2020).

► Other statements accusing Israel of responsibility for the spread of the virus:

◆ **Fatah spokesman Usama al-Qawasmeh** claimed Israel was responsible for the spread of the virus in [east] Jerusalem. He said Israel had recently detained several senior PA figures [operating] in east Jerusalem, as well as people who were disinfecting public areas and raising awareness of the virus. He also **said the Israeli government had caused the virus to spread more easily in the West Bank cities, among other reasons to keep Israel's economy active at the expense of Palestinian workers.** "Our people are fighting against two [sic] epidemics: COVID-19, the settlements and Israeli racism" (Raya News website, April 13, 2020).

◆ **Mustafa Barghouti, general secretary of the Palestinian National Initiative Movement, accused Israel of responsibility for the spread of COVID-19 in Judea and Samaria because of what he called "Israel's policy of medical negligence" towards [east] Jerusalem and Area C.** He said Israel had closed clinics in east Jerusalem which had opened to prevent the spread of the virus. In addition, he claimed Israel refuses to test Palestinian workers returning to the PA territories from Israel and is therefore responsible for the spread of the virus (Ma'an, April 16, 2020).

► For Palestinian Prisoners Day, the Commission for Detainees and Former Detainees Affairs issued a call to release the Palestinian [terrorist] prisoners because of what it called "the threat of COVID-19 to their lives" (Facebook page of the Commission for Detainees and Former Detainees Affairs, April 18, 2020).



Call for the release of the Palestinian terrorist prisoners whose lives are [allegedly] threatened by the virus (Facebook page of the Commission for Detainees and Former Detainees Affairs, April 18, 2020).

Help for the PA's Fight against COVID-19

► The PA continues to raise funds and ask for medical equipment. The main developments of the past week were the following:

- ◆ **David Friedman, the American ambassador to Israel, will donate \$5 million** to hospitals and Palestinian households as part of the fight against COVID-19 (David Friedman's Twitter account, April 16, 2020).
- ◆ On April 14, 2020, Mai al-Kaila, the Palestinian minister of health, attended the **delivery of medical supplies from the Chinese company Ali Baba**. The equipment included **50,000 COVID-19 testing kits**. Al-Kaila thanked China for its help (Facebook page of the Palestinian ministry of health, April 14, 2020).



The PA minister of health (center) receives medical supplies from China (Facebook page of the PA ministry of health, April 14, 2020).

- ◆ **Shukri Bshara**, the Palestinian minister of the treasury, and **Azzam al-Shawwa**, chairman of the Palestinian monetary authority, announced that the **PA had borrowed an additional \$400 million from the Palestinian Bank** to fund the emergency budget for the next six months, as declared by Mahmoud Abbas. Bshara said that the PA currently had outstanding bank loans of \$2 billion. He said the additional funding was to enable the PA to cope with the coronavirus, to pay its employees' salaries and to pay its debts to various suppliers (Ma'an, April 15, 2020).