



The Fight Against COVID-19 in the Palestinian Authority (Updated to May 4, 2020)

May 4, 2020

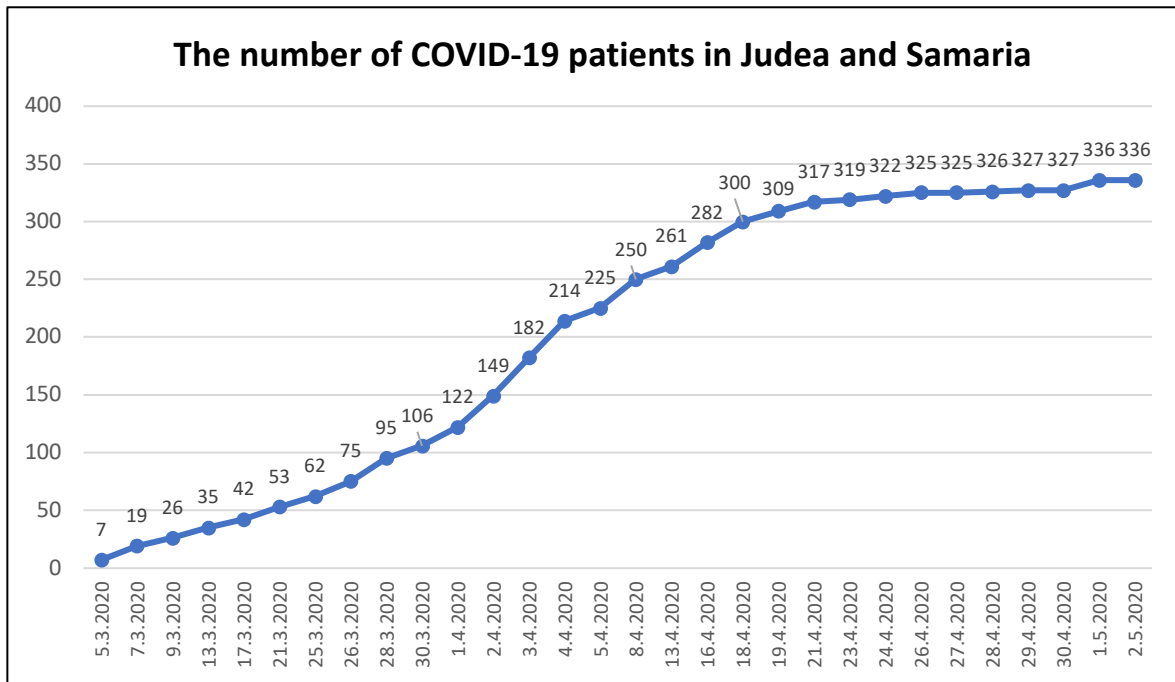
Overview

► 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), the number of cases of COVID-19 in Judea and Samaria continues **increasing at a moderate rate, with 336 reported cases, up from 309 from last week**. So far the number of Palestinians who have died remains two. Apparently **the spread of the virus is still under control**.
- ◆ The rate of spread in the **east Jerusalem neighborhoods has also slowed**. According to PA reports the number of **COVID-19 cases in east Jerusalem is 169** (154 last week).
- ◆ **The return of about 48,000 Palestinian workers to Israel began on May 3, 2020**, most of them construction workers. The decision to allow them to return was made by Israel in coordination with the PA (in spite of the PA's smear campaign which claims Israel spread the virus to the PA territories via returning workers). However, both sides understand that **the return of the workers to Israel is vital for both the Israeli and Palestinian economies**. According to reports, so far the return has been orderly with care being taken to observe the necessary health practices.
- ◆ PA Prime Minister Muhammad Shtayyeh said the PA's budget deficit was \$1.4 billion. He said **the damage to the Palestinian economy from the COVID-19 crisis is expected to reach \$3.1 billion by the end of the year, 2020**.

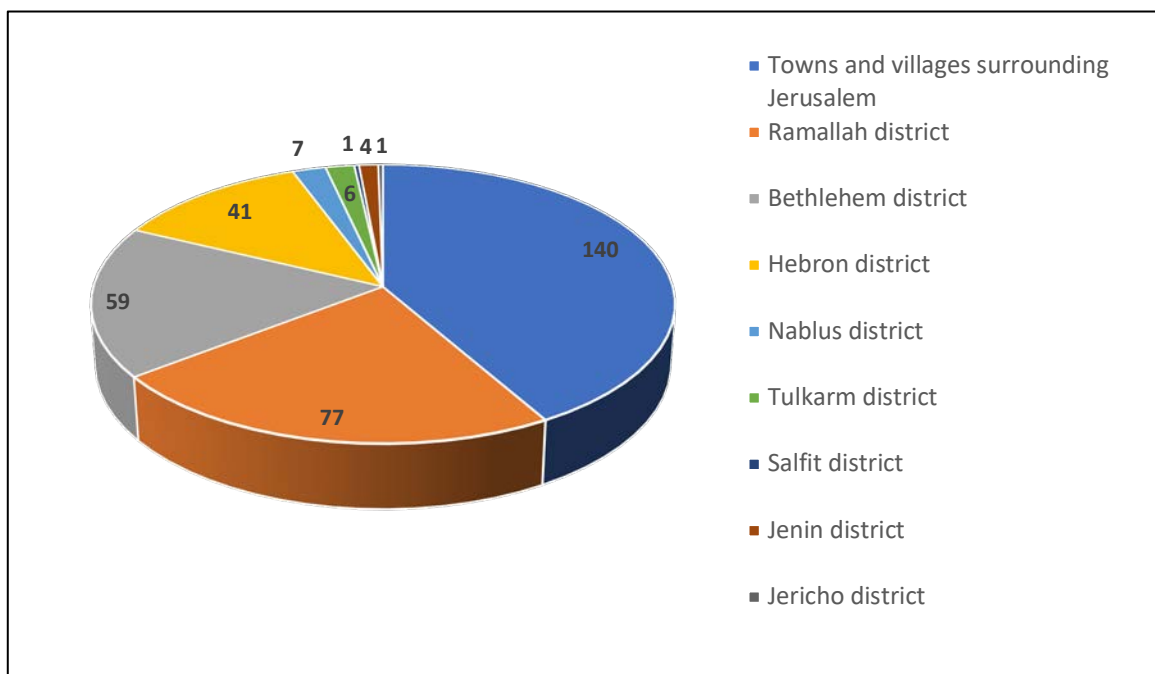
COVID-19 Infection in Judea and Samaria

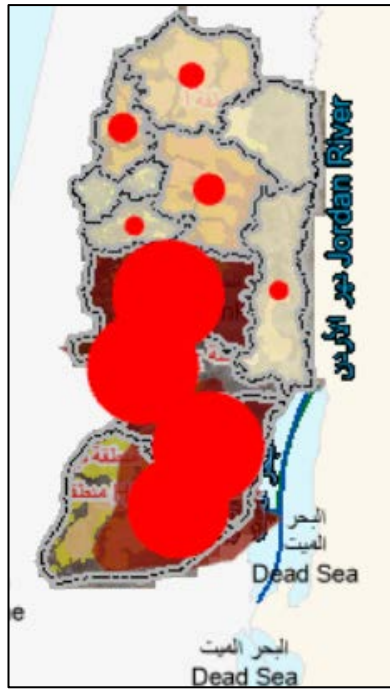
According to reports from the PA, the **number of COVID-19 patients in Judea and Samaria has risen to 336** (as of May 2, 2020). **The number of Palestinians who have died remains two; 69 have recovered**. In addition there are 169 reported cases in east Jerusalem (Twitter account of Ibrahim Melhem, Corona Map portal, April 26-May 3, 2020). **Thus the rate of the spread of the disease in the PA continues to be moderate**.



Geographic distribution of COVID-19 cases

► The hotspots of COVID-19 infection **are still in the towns and villages surrounding Jerusalem (140 cases), the Ramallah district (77), the Bethlehem district (59) and the Hebron district (41)**. The distribution in other districts is Nablus (seven cases), Tulkarm (six), (Jenin (four), Jericho (one) and Salfit (one) (Corona Map portal, May 3, 2020).

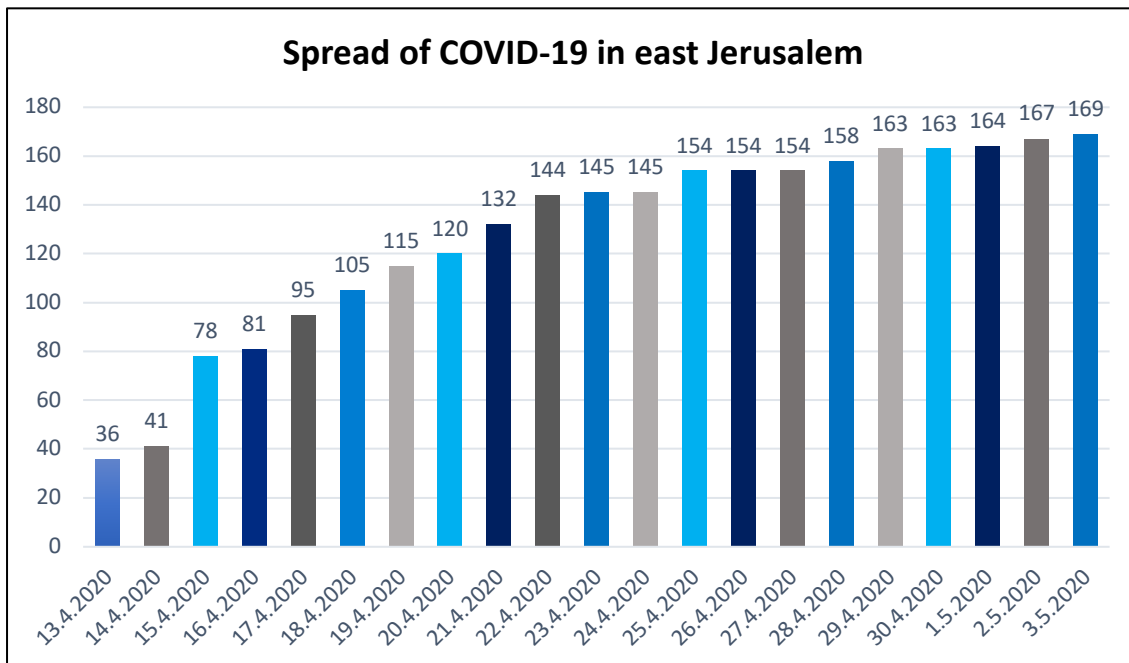




COVID-19 hotspots in Judea and Samaria
(Corona Map portal, May 3, 2020).

Infection in East Jerusalem

► According to PA reports (updated to May 3, 2020) **there are 169 cases of COVID-19 in east Jerusalem** (Twitter account of Ibrahim Melhem, April 26-May 3, 2020). The graph shows a **gradual moderation in the increase of reported cases in east Jerusalem neighborhoods.**



Palestinian Workers Return to Israel

On April 27, 2020, the Israeli government decided to authorize **the entrance of about 48,000 workers** from the PA territories into Israel. Of them, 36,000 have work permits for construction, 9,300 for agriculture and 3,000 for industry (Calcalist, April 28, 2020). **The Israeli decision was made in coordination with the PA, based on an understanding that the return of workers to Israel is vital for both the Israeli and Palestinian economies.** The PA permitted them to return despite its smear campaign claiming Israel spread the coronavirus to the PA territory via returning workers.

► **It was decided that Palestinian workers entering Israel would remain for three weeks,** until Eid al-Fitr, which ends the Muslim religious month of Ramadan. They would undergo medical testing at their places of employment in Israel and receive permits to sleep in Israel. If they return to the PA during Ramadan they will not be permitted to reenter Israel until the month ends. A worker diagnosed with COVID-19 while in Israel will be returned to the PA territories for medical treatment (Israel's Channel 11 TV, April 30, 2020).

► **Nasri Abu Jish, the PA minister of labor,** sent a letter to Hajj Isma'il Jabr, Mahmoud Abbas' advisor for the Palestinian security forces. He informed him of the expected exit of about 40,000 Palestinian workers to Israel, beginning May 3, 2020. To supervise their return to Israel he asked for the presence at the crossings of operatives of the preventive security forces, representatives of the offices of the various district governments and representatives of the ministry of civil affairs (Facebook page of the Palestinian ministry of labor, April 30, 2020).



Palestinian workers enter Israel on the morning of May 3, 2020, through the Meitar Crossing south of Hebron (Shehab Facebook page, May 3, 2020).

► **On May 3, 2020, approximately 14,000 Palestinian workers entered Israel.** Their entrance was orderly and they observed the health guidelines for preventing COVID-19 infection. According to reports, operatives of the Palestinian security forces, PA officials and

administration staff were in attendance on the Palestinian side of the crossings from the early morning, listing the workers' names and organizing their entrance into Israel. The workers entered in groups, wearing masks and in some instances gloves, and keeping their distance from one another (KAN, Israeli TV, May 3, 2020). A spokesman for the Palestinian ministry of labor reported that the Palestinian workers would be allowed to enter Israel on May 3 and 4, 2020, between 02:30 in the morning and 12:00 noon. Every hour only 500 workers would be permitted to enter (Wafa, May 1, 2020).

PA Measures

The Hebron district

► On April 27, 2020, **Jibrin al-Bakri, the governor of the Hebron district, announced the opening of the district's central coronavirus testing laboratory.** It was opened through the joint efforts of the Palestinian ministry of health, the KfW (a German state-owned development bank, based in Frankfurt) and local donors. The laboratory has cutting-edge equipment which allows testing for the virus to be conducted in Hebron without having to send test samples to the main laboratory in Ramallah (Facebook page of the governor of the Hebron district, April 29, 2020). **Behind the opening of the laboratory was the increase in the number of COVID-19 cases diagnosed in the district.**



Right: The central laboratory in Hebron (Facebook page of the governor of the Hebron district, April 29, 2020). Left: Cutting the ribbon in the ceremony opening the central laboratory in Hebron. Present are the governor of the Hebron district and the mayor of the city of Hebron (Facebook page of the Hebron municipality, April 27, 2020).

Relaxing preventive measures

► On April 27, 2020, PA Prime Minister Muhammad Shtayyeh authorized the opening of clothing and shoe stores on Sundays, Tuesdays and Thursdays, in accordance with required public health safety procedures (Facebook page of the governor of the Hebron district, April 29, 2018). **That may mean the relaxing of preventive measures taken by the PA in view of**

the encouraging data on the halting of the spread of COVID-19 in the PA territories.

However, it is still remains to be seen if the measure is part of a planned COVID-19 crisis exit strategy.

Poor commercial activity during Ramadan because of the coronavirus



Right: Only a few customers in the Muslim quarter of the Old City of Jerusalem (Wafa, April 28, 2020). Left: The almost-empty market in Hebron (Wafa, April 30, 2020).

The PA's Economic Hardships

► On April 27, 2020, PA Prime Minister Muhammad Shtayyeh gave a daily updating of the developments in the fight against COVID-19, during which he related to the PA's financial condition. He said that so far the **PA's budget deficit had reached \$1.4 billion**. He said Israel's decision to confiscate \$450 million was [allegedly] "genuine piracy" and theft, which would worsen the PA's deficit. In addition, he said, **the damage to the PA's economy from the coronavirus was expected to reach \$3.1 billion by the end of the year [2020]** (Muhammad Shtayyeh's Facebook page, April 27, 2020).



PA Prime Minister Muhammad Shtayyeh's daily briefing on developments in the fight against COVID-19 (Muhammad Shtayyeh's Facebook page, April 27, 2020).

The Anti-Israel Smear Campaign



The PA daily newspaper al-Hayat al-Jadeeda, the official PA organ, continues its incitement and propaganda against Israel: the alleged danger of death to Palestinian prisoners in Israeli jails. The Arabic reads, "The Israeli prisons" (al-Hayat al-Jadeeda, April 29, 2020).