

Sale of counterfeit face masks and surgical gloves on the rise in Egypt

Author:

Sat, 2020-03-28 21:04

CAIRO: As demand for protective gear to combat the coronavirus disease COVID-19 rises, Egypt is witnessing a concurrent rise in counterfeit face masks and surgical gloves being offered for sale.

Egyptian security officials are in pursuit of a number of people who are attempting to profit from the global crisis by selling fake protective clothing. Officials in Sharqeya governorate, south of Cairo, have announced that they uncovered an unlicensed two-story factory manufacturing medical kits.

Security officials found 1,500 bogus facemasks, 500 pieces of cloth unrelated to factory work and 10 sewing machines.

In Giza governorate, security officials raided a factory producing fake face masks following a tipoff. Police discovered 200,000 face masks of unknown origin and arrested the factory's two unemployed owners.

Other raids in the Cairo resulted in the detention of a warehouse owner for the bottling of unlicensed sanitizers intended for sale at inflated prices. Police found 17 tons of ethyl alcohol and 2,500 empty bottles "ready to be filled" in the warehouse, all of which were undocumented and of unknown origin.

Elsewhere, five people were detained for renting a workshop in a neighborhood affiliated to Al-Maasara police station in Cairo. They were using the workshop to manufacture unlicensed medical face masks using materials of unknown origin and an unregistered logo to sell them.

Police reportedly discovered 45 meters of cloth for making face masks, 1,500 face masks that had been made in the workshop, "huge numbers" of illegally obtained face masks, and six sewing machines.

The Investigation Unit at the 6 of October police station in Cairo has detained the owner of a medical supply office, the owner of a laundry shop, and a tailor at the same shop for manufacturing medical face masks using cheap materials of unknown origin which do not conform to international standards. The detainees were reportedly packaging the face masks in fake sanitized packages to fool customers.

Parliamentarian Tarek Metwally, a member of the Industry Committee in the House, submitted a request for an examination of such items, saying that face masks and sanitizers of unknown origin have been found in market places. These products have not been manufactured in accordance with proper health standards and had been selling on a large scale, feeding on the public's fear

of COVID-19 and desire to find ways to protect themselves.

Metwally claimed that counterfeit face masks that do not conform to the required standards and could actually transmit the virus. He also suggested that sanitizers made in unlicensed factories are dangerous “because no one knows what they are made of” and that they “might cause skin cancer.”

The cost of face masks has skyrocketed in Egypt, particularly since some private schools – although they are currently shut – had informed parents that they should buy face masks on a daily basis.

Hatem El-Badawy, a member of the Pharmacies Owners Division at the Chambers of Commerce Union, called on authorities to monitor face mask manufacturers to guarantee high-quality products for consumers.

He told Arab News that black-market face masks harm consumers rather than protect them.

By Friday evening, Egypt had reported 495 infections, including 24 deaths, since COVID-19 first appeared in the country in mid-February.



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Egypt reports 39 new coronavirus cases, 7 recoveries

New coronavirus cases confirmed in Libya as fighting flares

Author:

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Sat, 2020-03-28 17:16

TUNIS: Two new cases of the coronavirus have been confirmed in Libya, authorities said on Saturday, after the first was detected earlier this week, with international aid agencies warning of a disaster if it spreads. The two cases were discovered in Tripoli and Misrata, the National Center for Disease Control said, without giving any further details. The first, confirmed on Monday, was a man who had recently returned to Libya from overseas.

Libya has been in turmoil since the toppling of strongman Muammar Qaddafi in 2011 and is split between two warring administrations. The conflict has wrecked the economy, fueled migrant smuggling and militancy, and disrupted oil supplies.

This week, fighting flared again as battles erupted on several fronts after months of suspected imports of weapons and foreign fighters in breach of an arms embargo.

The World Health Organization and other agencies have warned that the fighting will make it far harder to prevent the spread of the coronavirus in Libya, and the United Nations has called for an immediate humanitarian cease-fire.

In Friday's battles, focused in the southern suburbs of Tripoli and in the area between the coastal cities of Misrata and Sirte, dozens of fighters were reported killed on both sides.



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Libyan National Forces Alliance leader quarantined in Egypt after testing positive for coronavirus
Fighting escalates in Libya despite coronavirus threat

[Tunisia gets 250 mln euros from EU to tackle coronavirus impact](#)

Author:

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1585414697680291200

Sat, 2020-03-28 16:55

TUNIS: The European Union has granted Tunisia 250 million euros in aid to help it cope with the economic and social effects of the coronavirus outbreak, EU ambassador Patrice Bergamini said on Saturday in a tweet. Tunisia, which suffers from limited health infrastructure, is fighting to contain the outbreak after it said it had 227 confirmed cases and six deaths.

Prime Minister Elyes Fakhfakh said last week that the government was allocating \$850 million to combat the economic and social effects of the health crisis.

The International Monetary Fund will disburse \$400 million to help the country face the effects of the crisis, finance minister Nizar Yaich has said.

Tunisia now expects an economic recession, prompting the central bank this month to cut its key interest rate by 100 basis points from 7.75%.

Fakhfakh has said the government cut its growth forecast this year to 1% from 2.7% in part due of coronavirus crisis.



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Tunisian handed 10 years for ricin bomb plot in Germany
Brits stranded in Tunisia as national carrier staff fear flying amid coronavirus

In Iraq, deadly coronavirus terrifies even doctors hardened by conflict

Author:

Sat, 2020-03-28 01:28

BADGHDAD: Through decades of conflict, Dr. Haidar Hantoush has watched wounded soldiers and civilians flood into Iraq's emergency wards. But he's never been so scared.

"Violence we can just about handle. Patients stream into hospitals for hours at a time – but you can see how many there are. You get a lull to prepare for the next round," said Hantoush, public health director for southern province Dhi Qar.

"With coronavirus, there's no safe place. We don't know when the number of cases will explode ... Even the world's best health care systems can't cope." Doctors and nurses across Iraq have treated hundreds of thousands of victims during decades of civil war, violence and sanctions, while watching what was once one of the best health care systems in the Middle East crumble. Now, they say Iraq may be singularly unprepared for the coronavirus. Iraq has a porous border with Iran, the worst-hit Middle Eastern country so far. The Iraqi religious calendar is dotted with annual pilgrimages, some of the biggest mass gatherings on earth, which typically attract millions of worshippers.

And since last year, Iraq's major cities have seen mass anti-government demonstrations that killed hundreds of people. State institutions are paralyzed by political deadlock after the government resigned and politicians failed to form a new one.

So far, Iraq has counted more than 450 coronavirus disease (COVID-19) cases and 40 deaths, most of them in the past week. But doctors worry that those figures barely scratch the surface of an epidemic that may already be raging undetected across crowded cities.

"There are many unrecorded cases. People aren't getting tested or taking it seriously," Hantoush said.

Loudspeakers on mosques in Baghdad blast out government guidelines daily urging people to stay at home and get tested if they think they are ill. A curfew is in place until April 11. Borders are shut and international flights halted.

With coronavirus, there's no safe place. We don't know when the number of cases will explode ... Even the world's best health care systems can't cope.

Dr. Haidar Hantoush, Public health director

But getting the message across is difficult in a country with deep distrust of the authorities. Tribes have sometimes refused to allow women with symptoms to be isolated because they do not want them to be alone in hospitals, Hantoush said.

Thousands of Iraqis participated in the most recent of Iraq's major pilgrimages, to the shrine of a Shiite Imam in Baghdad, where they crowded in defiance of the curfew.

"We're now asking pilgrims to self-isolate for 14 days," said Dr. Laith Jubr, 30, who works at a Baghdad ward testing suspected coronavirus cases.

The hospital had three deaths from the virus in the last week, he said, and several staff tested positive. Some people showing symptoms refused to be tested because they did not want to spend time in isolation.

"If this gets bigger it could be beyond our control. We could have 1,000 cases next week. There's a lack of ventilators and other equipment – maybe 10 ventilators at our hospital."

Jubr said many Iraqis were nonchalant because they thought they had "seen it all" through years of war.

"This is dangerous. We're facing a hidden enemy that requires not just doctors but the whole population to combat it."

Security forces deployed on Friday to Baghdad's densely populated Sadr City district, home to millions including many pilgrims, to enforce the curfew, a statement said.

The UN praised Iraq's early measures in closing borders last month but has urged respect for the curfew.

One Baghdad doctor said a sharp rise in cases is imminent.

"We're bracing for what happens in the next two weeks. And we can't cope," he said.



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As world locks down, Qatari construction presses ahead Abu Dhabi crown prince,

[As world locks down, Qatari construction presses ahead](#)

Author:

Sat, 2020-03-28 01:18

LONDON: The outbreak of coronavirus disease (COVID-19) across much of the world has forced many governments to act, with most ordering restrictions on daily life and working conditions, and some even ordering complete shutdowns in a bid to contain the pandemic.

Even where governments have left the choice up to employers, many have taken the decision to let employees work from home where possible to slow the spread, with others shutting down work for the foreseeable future to protect lives.

That has not been the case in Qatar, though, where many migrant laborers are still working on crowded, dangerous construction sites as the country gears up to host the 2022 FIFA World Cup.

Qatar's government has banned "all forms of gatherings ... including but not limited to the Corniche, public parks, beaches and social gatherings."

But despite also putting in place near-total bans on the operating of gyms, malls and banks, construction sites were notably not part of the ban.

Qatar currently has the third-highest number of confirmed COVID-19 cases in the Middle East, at 500.

But as Doha struggles to respond to COVID-19, and with the World Cup inching closer, work on stadiums and other infrastructure projects has continued apace, despite the majority of its cases being migrants.

Workers at Qatari construction sites reportedly receive very little in the way of health checks, and commute to work on packed buses from the camps in which they live, where proximity to others, often with 10 people to a dormitory, is a near constant.

In a report by The Guardian, laborers said they felt they had no choice but to continue going to work, facing pressure both from the companies that employ them and the need to support their families overseas.

It is hard for employees in any context to refuse to go to work, but in systems like Qatar, where employers have extreme levels of control over workers, it would be particularly risky.

James Lynch, Expert on migrant workers

"I worry a lot about getting the virus, but I need the money," said a Kenyan laborer, adding that he was not provided with protection beyond gloves and a

mask on his 14-hour shifts.

A Nepalese worker told The Guardian: "I use a face mask, which I bought myself. Those who don't have a mask cover their mouth with a piece of cloth." Migrant workers in Qatar face a difficult choice, especially with the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Many pay large fees to secure sponsorship allowing them to travel, are underpaid for their labor, and are only allowed to leave or change their jobs with the permission of their employers – a practice many have likened to slavery and which, despite promises by Doha to end it, remains widespread. James Lynch, a director at Fair/Square Research and Projects, and an expert on migrant workers in Qatar, told The Guardian: "It is hard for employees in any context to refuse to go to work, but in systems like Qatar, where employers have extreme levels of control over workers, it would be particularly risky."

He added: "New migration to Qatar has been halted as a result of the pandemic, so the impact of losing your job is now even worse than it would be anyway."

Many have been outraged at the government's response, with social media posts illustrating the extent of ill-feeling among members of Qatar's migrant worker community.

"No one cares about our safety," said one. "Do they think we don't want to live? Do you think we don't want to see our families?"

Another wrote: "We are not robots. We are not immune to the virus."



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Abu Dhabi crown prince, Syrian president discuss coronavirus
Turkish economy 'will be hardest hit by virus' among G20, says Moody's