

COVID-19 Pandemic in North Cyprus

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ABSTRACT

When COVID -19, the novel coronavirus leading to severe acute respiratory syndrome, first identified in Wuhan China during December 2019, Northern Cyprus community would never imagine the virus could make its way to the less populated and mostly isolated part of the island. During the first week of March 2020, the uneasiness was in the minds of people and suspected coronavirus cases started to surface. However, until 10th of March 2020, the suspected cases were found COVID-19 negative. On 10th of March 2020, the first positive case of COVID -19 was reported who was a German woman tourist, arrived with a charter flight two days before. By 12th of April, North Cyprus had a total of 99 positive COVID -19 cases, 3 deaths and 57 recovered.

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INTRODUCTION

Wuhan, China became the epicenter of an unknown pneumonia outbreak in December, 2019 and Chinese authorities started the procedures in order to understand the cause and control the outbreak while the situation took the international attention [1]. Later, on 30th of January 2020, World Health Organization (WHO) declared the outbreak as a public health emergency of international concern and on 11th of February the novel coronavirus was named as COVID-19 by WHO [2].

DEVELOPMENT OF COVID-19 PANDEMIC IN NORTH CYPRUS

Timeline

In North Cyprus, which is the mostly isolated part of the island because of the current embargoes thanks to its politically instable history, the global outbreak was not an issue, the daily life was not disturbed and even the community was not concerned until beginning of March 2020. The uneasiness in the minds of people residing in North Cyprus started when two suspected cases in South side of Cyprus was confirmed positive on 9th of March 2020 [3]. When the first two cases were confirmed on the South side of the island, the frequency of suspected

cases in the North has increased as well. Just one day before the COVID-19 was declared as a pandemic by WHO, on 10th of March 2020, the first positive case of COVID -19 was reported in North Cyprus who was a German woman tourist, arrived with a German tourist group on a charter flight two days before [4] (Exhibited in **Figure 1**). While on 11th of March 2020, the second positive case was found to be the husband of the German Woman; the first Turkish Cypriot positive case was confirmed just after two days, a man who returned from Britain, on 12th of March 2020, along with two more German tourists from the same tourist group which increased the total cases up to five [5] (Exhibited in **Figure 2**). On 28th of March 2020, the first person died from COVID-19 in North Cyprus, who was a 74 years old man with underlying health conditions [6].

Response of Authorities

Even though North Cyprus never encountered such a serious epidemic situation in recent decades, authorities and community responded to the situation promptly and tried to handle the control of the pandemic. On 12th of March 2020, two days after the first positive case, authorities shut down all learning institutions in North Cyprus and as the outbreak continued and

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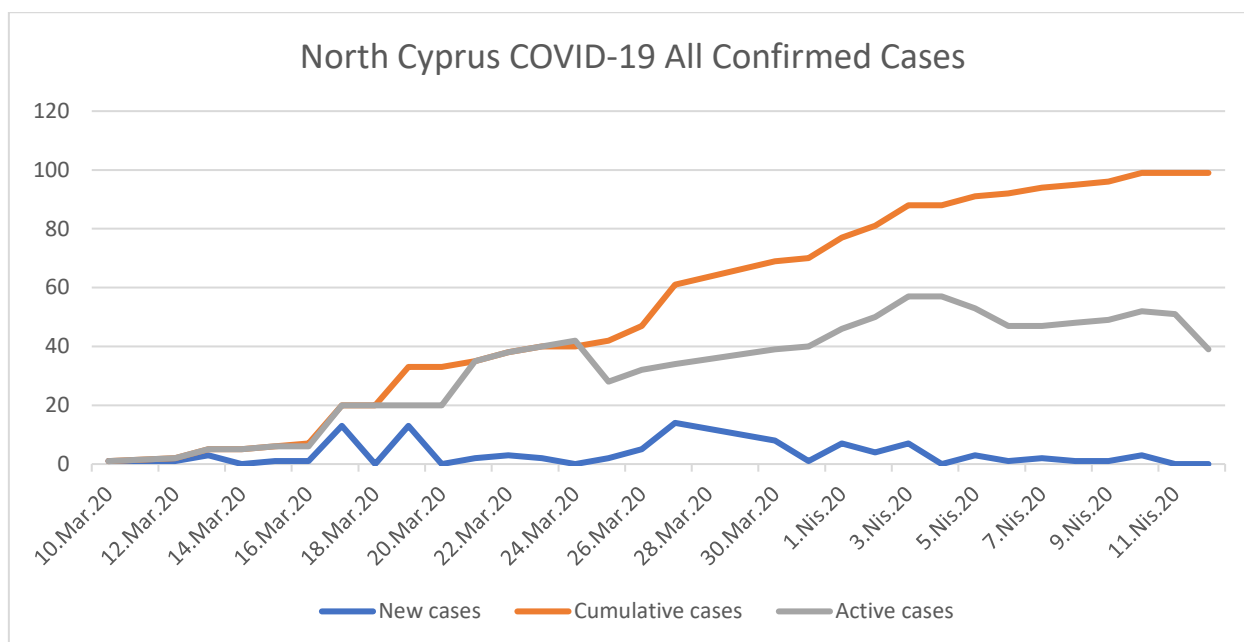


Figure 1. North Cyprus COVID-19 Cumulative Cases

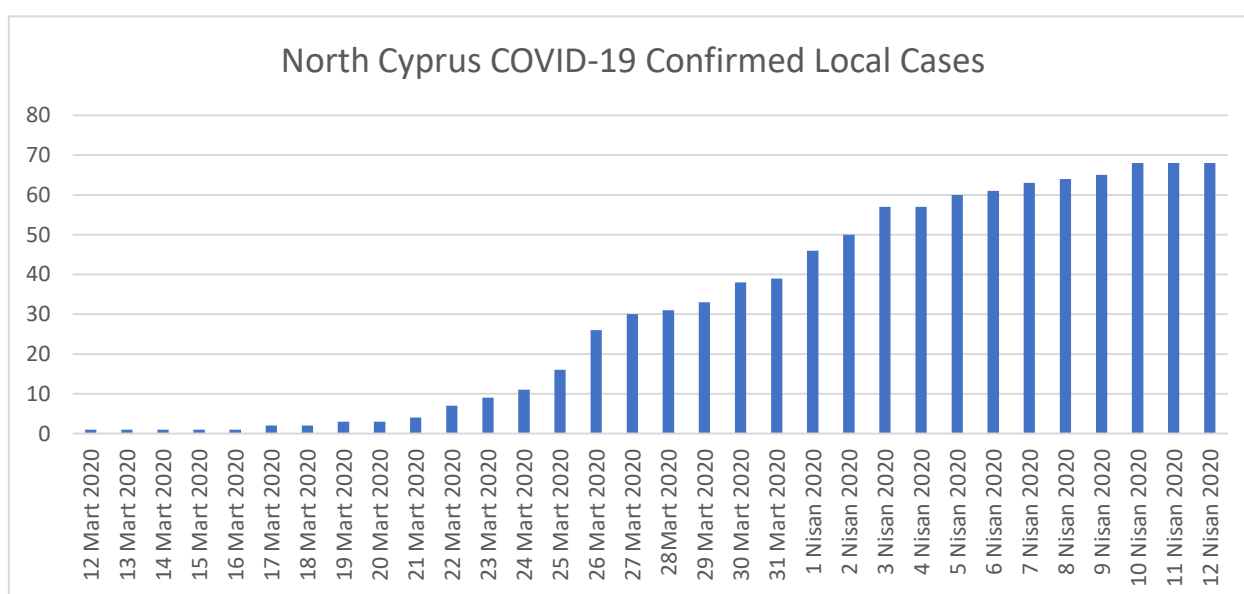


Figure 2. North Cyprus COVID-19 Turkish Cypriot Cases

positive cases started to pile up to 35, on 22th of March 2020, authorities declared a partial curfew in order to support the social distance, many public offices and private businesses were shut down, only supermarkets, pharmacies, gas stations, hospitals and banks were remained open for limited time periods during the daytime [7]. As of 19th of March 2020, North Cyprus was already on lockdown and its borders were shut, not allowing anyone but citizens to enter country [8]. Later on 30th of March 2020, in addition to partial curfew decision, a night time curfew was declared which restricted the people to go out completely at night between 21:00-06:00 [9].

As a result of the measures put by authorities, as well as contact tracing and testing, the spreading of COVID-19

continued on a slow daily rate. By 12th of April, one month after the first Turkish Cypriot case, North Cyprus had a total of 99 positive COVID -19 cases, 3 deaths and 57 recovered.

Community Perspective About COVID-19 Pandemic

Since the day first positive case of COVID-19 was confirmed in North Cyprus, Turkish Cypriots started to feel high levels of apprehension. People started to gather in large groups on social media to share latest information about COVID-19 pandemic as well as to encourage everyone to stay at home. The main concern of the Turkish Cypriots was about the current healthcare system in North Cyprus. People were (and still are) insecure about the strength of healthcare system and medical supplies, especially the test kits. One of the reasons contributed to this insecurity was the fact that the

biggest state hospital of North Cyprus was burnt down substantially just ten days before the confirmation of first positive COVID-19 case in Northern Cyprus [10]. However, currently the same public hospital is now refurbished and declared as the pandemic hospital. Another reason of the insecurity is the result of embargoes and economic structure of North Cyprus which makes it difficult to reach for the medical supplies that will be needed during a pandemic.

CONCLUSION

As COVID-19 impacted the societies around the world, it is still causing harm not only to health of people but social and economic lives. While countries are trying to work out their own way of dealing with the pandemic, North Cyprus is also struggling to fight with COVID-19 by all methods and tools in its power. However North Cyprus has limited resources and infrastructure, it is practicing good progression to fight with the novel coronavirus. In addition to the efforts of authorities, the community is responsible from following the regulations and taking the measures by using masks, gloves and frequent hand washing as well as not leaving their homes except urgent situations.

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