



الكتلة الوطنية
NATIONAL BLOC

Lebanon's Health crisis and Hospitals' oversaturation

19/01/2021



Due to the rising number of Covid-19 cases and deaths and the oversaturation of public and private hospitals in Lebanon, the caretaker government imposed a 24-hour curfew until January 25.

Despite the lockdown, Covid-19 and deaths are surging exponentially. The Lebanese Red Cross volunteers are carrying COVID-19 patients from one hospital to another due to the lack of hospital beds.

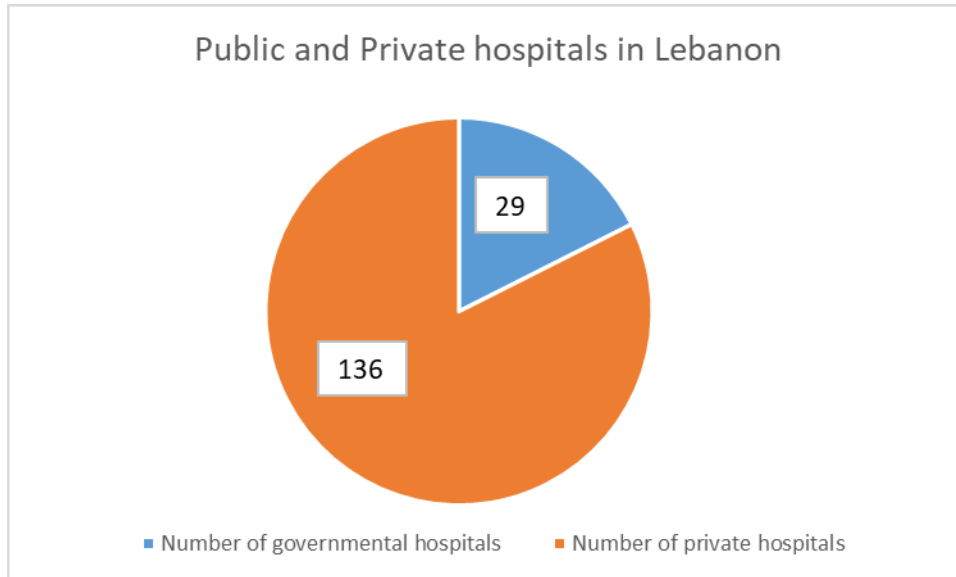
Today, Lebanon's medical sector is characterized by the lack of infrastructure and medical staff due to high emigration rates among doctors as well as the contamination and isolation of others. Moreover, difficulties in acquiring medical supplies increased due to the depreciation of the LBP and the government's inability to pay its dues on time.

This report examines the Covid-19 crisis in Lebanon by focusing on hospitals capacity and the causes of their oversaturation.



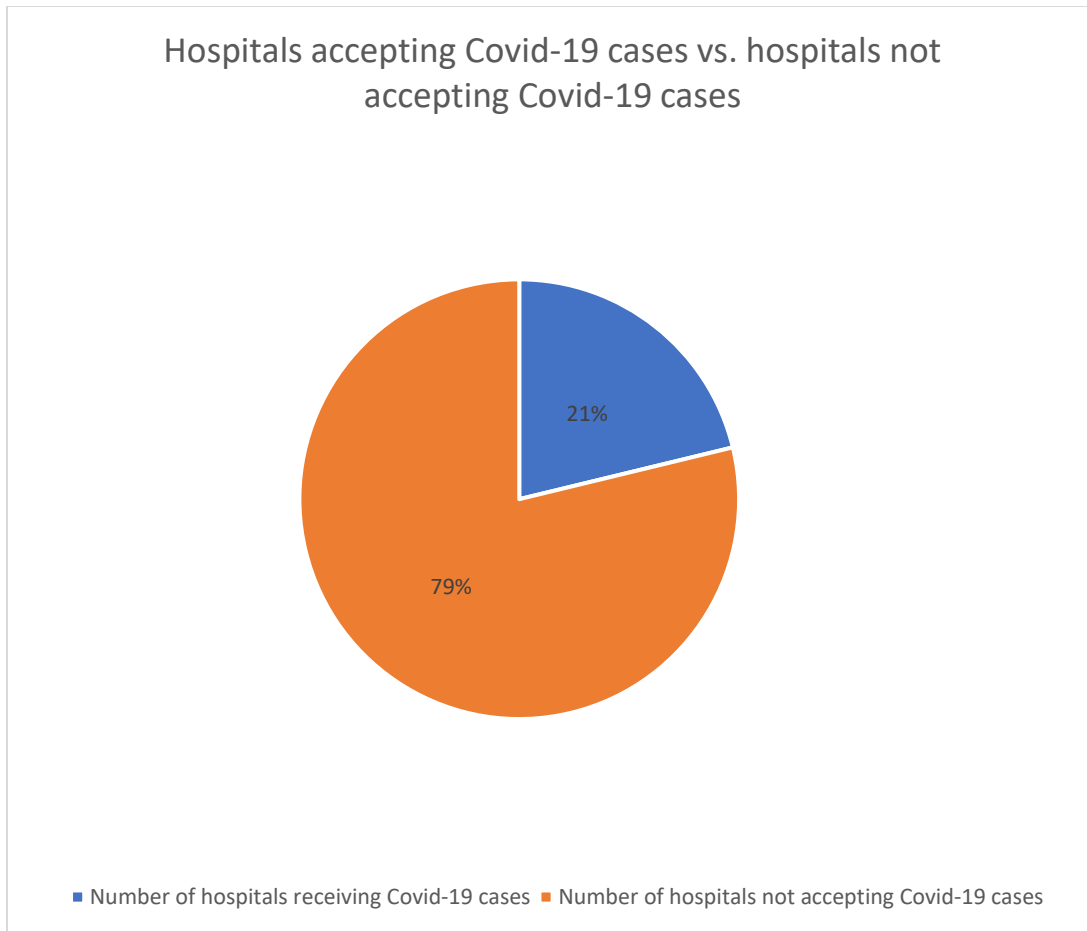
1- Facts & figures

Lebanon has 165 hospitals in total among which 29 are governmental and 136 are private:



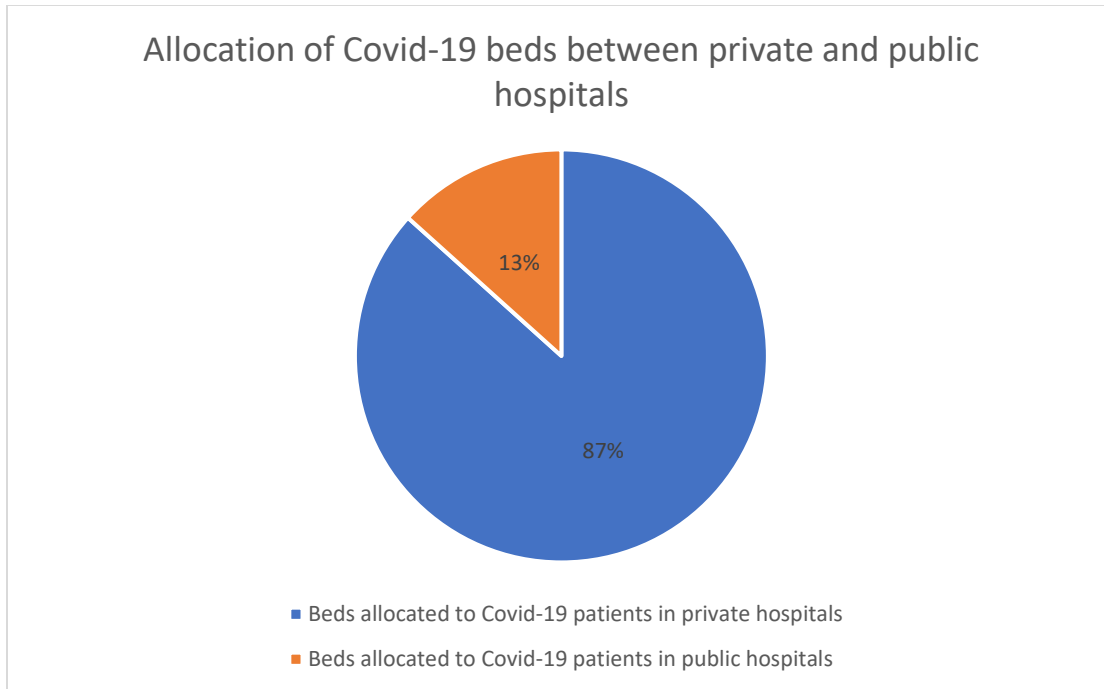
Source: MoPH, 2021

Among the 165 hospitals in Lebanon, only 35 accept Covid-19 cases:



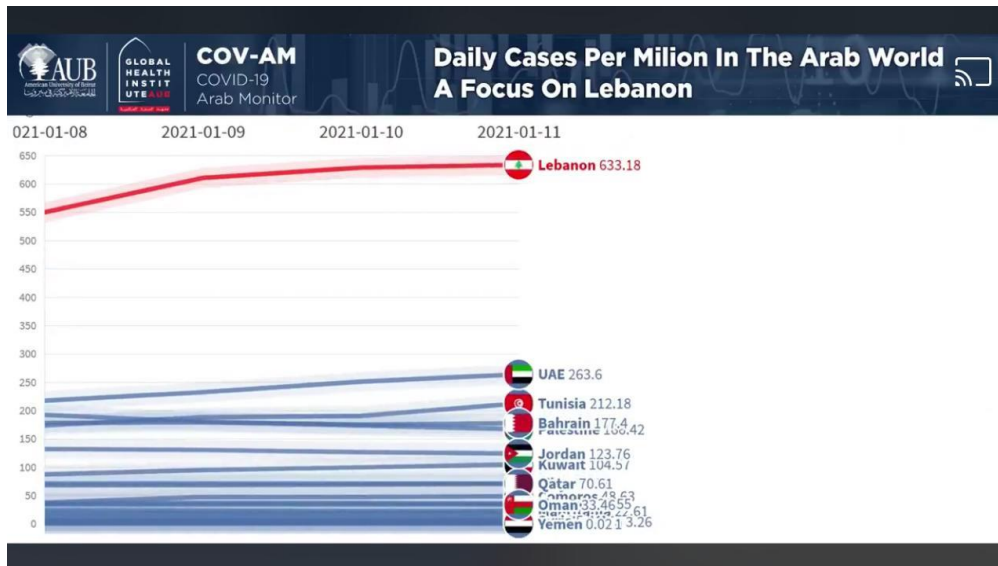
Source: Chreek medical team & MoPH, 2021

Approximatively 15,000 beds have been allocated in the hospitals for COVID-19 patients, with 13,000 in private hospitals and 2,000 in public hospitals:



Source: Hamad Hassan, 2020

Lebanon registers the highest number of cases per million people in the Arab world:



Source: AUB, 2021

2- Oversaturation of hospitals

a- The lack in infrastructure

Beirut Port's explosion

Almost 40 hospitals were damaged due to the Beirut Port double-explosion, among which 3 hospitals were destroyed.

Rising number of cases

Most hospitals have now reached maximum capacity for Covid-19 cases. They ran out of beds, oxygen tanks and ventilators. Although private hospitals have increased the number of beds allocated to Covid-19 cases in December 2020, they are oversaturated.

Testimonials

AUBMC released a statement warning that it is “unable to find beds for even the most critical patients”.

Mount Lebanon Hospital also issued a warning on social media stating that it is treating over 60 Covid-19 patients and that it will soon be oversaturated.

Geitawi Hospital announced that its emergency department was filled with Covid-19 patients.

Saint Georges Hospital also announced that all its beds are occupied which encouraged it to convert its cafeteria into a space for receiving Covid-19 patients.

Hotel Dieu Hospital told Arabian Business: “There are no more rooms to treat Covid-19 patients, even the ordinary rooms are nearly full. We are treating patients in the car park or in their cars. It is a catastrophe. We fear the worst in the coming weeks.”

Increasing demand for oxygen machines

Lebanon is facing a shortage of oxygen machines, and some citizens are stocking them for private use. Sellers of such machines are imposing tremendously high prices to profit from the rising demand and the machines' scarcity:

	Current prices
Oxygen machine	1,300 - 1,600 USD
Oxygen bottle 50L	350 USD
Oxygen regulator	120 USD

Source: A random Lebanese supplier that was called on the 17th of January 2021

Salma Assi, head of the Medical Equipment and Devices Importers Syndicate, stated: "Companies received their requests for oxygen equipment today. Some companies expect to receive their requests during this week and others at the end of the week."

b- The medical staff shortage

Dr. Charaf Abou Charaf, head of Lebanese Order of Physicians, announced that 11 doctors have died due to Covid-19, 25 are in critical care and 300 are in isolation.

Moreover, according to Dr. Charaf Abou Charaf, more than 400 doctors have chosen to leave Lebanon between July and September 2020.

Last but not least, the Lebanese economic crisis has forced many hospitals to fire part of their medical staff in order to reduce their expenses. For instance, AUBMC laid off more than 800 of its personnel on the 17th of July 2020.

c- Hospitals finances and state's dues

Lebanon is unable to acquire more beds due to the depreciation of the LBP and the government's failure to pay accumulated hospital dues.

450 billion pounds of debt is owed by the Lebanese state to hospitals. Hamad Hassan, caretaker health minister has signed the first payment of financial dues for government and private hospitals. However, MoPH's payments for hospitals and medical services are billed in LBP at the official exchange rate, while hospitals import their medical supplies in USD. Nevertheless, hospitals are still billing for services at the official exchange rate, which made them incur tremendous losses.

d- Qatari field hospitals

Two weeks after the Beirut Port explosion, Minister Hamad Hassan sent a letter to the Qatari embassy requesting a field hospital to face mitigate the rapid propagation of Covid-19 like the hospitals that Qatar sent to Italy, and those that were placed in the Karantina and Jeitaoui regions. When they were used in other countries, like Italy, the experience was positive. In fact, Italy was able to treat more Covid-19 patients and save many lives when its hospitals were over-saturated.

Two aircrafts of the Qatari Emiri Air Force carrying two field hospitals for Tyre and Tripoli arrived in Lebanon on the 11th of November 2020. This type of hospital was used in western countries which are more advanced than Lebanon to treat Covid-19 patients.

During a meeting in Tripoli's municipal palace on the 6th of January 2021, Riad Yamak, the mayor of Tripoli, presented plans to build the Qatari field hospital in North Lebanon upon which MoPH agreed.

The Lebanese Army will be responsible for building the hospital on a piece of land that was donated by a local businessman.

Although Tyre's governmental hospital is not equipped, Tyre rejected the field hospital due to the tensions and non-consensus between Hezbollah and Amal movement on the location of the hospital in Tyre.

Nabih Berri then stated that the field hospital could benefit Beirut citizens. However, Tyre's Covid-19 situation is dire, and Covid-19 patients are moving daily from Saida to Beirut to receive treatment.

3- Delay in the Covid-19 vaccine arrival

The Lebanese government did not think of acquiring the Covid-19 vaccine from different suppliers, and it only signed its final deal for 2.1 million doses of the Pfizer-BioNtech vaccine on the 17th of January 2021. They are expected to arrive in batches starting February 2021.

In the meantime, the Parliament passed on the 15th of January 2021 a law allowing the use of emergency vaccines. For a period of two years, the law protects the producers of any Covid-19 vaccine used in Lebanon from potential liability claims.

Also, the government signed up for 2.73 million doses of vaccine through COVAX, but it has not announced their arrival date.

The vaccine is expected to primarily target medical and nursing staff, and those aged over 75 years old. However, we expect that the vaccine's distribution will be subject to political favoritism and clientelism.

Due to the government's failure in imposing strict lockdown measures during the festivities as well as in supporting hospitals and acquiring vaccines, the Lebanese health sector is suffering. Consequently, Covid-19 cases and deaths are surging exponentially, and hospitals are oversaturated.

Once a lead in medicine among Arab countries, today Lebanon registers the highest number of cases per million people in the Arab world.

It is only the arrival of vaccines that will allow authorities to control the rapid propagation of the virus. However, on the long term, structural, governance, and financial reforms need to be implemented in the medical sector.