

Gaza Health Ministry warns of hospital crisis amid lack of fuel and medical supplies

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A Palestinian medic prepares to evacuate premature babies from the al-Aqsa Martyrs Hospital in Deir al-Balah in the central Gaza Strip following renewed Israeli evacuation orders on August 26, 2024. (Photo by AFP)

Gaza City, August 27 (RHC)-- The Health Ministry in Gaza has warned that healthcare facilities in the war-racked territory are nearing closure due to an acute fuel shortage for generators and a severe lack of medical supplies, caused by Israel's heavy import restrictions.

The director general of Gaza's Health Ministry, Munir al-Bursh, said more than 60% of vital medications are currently inaccessible in the Gaza Strip as a result of the persistent Israeli blockade.

Al-Bursh underscored that fuel supplies for hospitals in Gaza City and the northern strip are "adequate for just the next 48 hours," stressing that the dire lack of fuel and medical resources significantly obstructs attempts to assist the wounded amid the ongoing violence.

He condemned Israel for intentionally starving civilians, as fuel deliveries to northern Gaza continue to be blocked for the fourth consecutive day. He further noted that the Israeli forces have obstructed the delivery of vaccines via the Netzarim corridor into northern Gaza, highlighting the difficulties of immunizing children amid persistent violence and the lack of a secure, healthy environment.

Late Sunday, the health ministry announced that it had received 1.26 million doses of polio vaccine, and initiated vaccination of more than 600,000 children under the age of 10, in response to the region's first confirmed polio case in a quarter of a century.

However, humanitarian agencies have stressed that several factors, including the ongoing airstrikes on Gaza, could hinder the progress of the campaign as at least a seven-day pause in the conflict is needed to ensure effective immunization.

Palestine was polio-free for 25 years, but the disease made resurgence due to the collapse of sanitary infrastructure in Gaza.

The spread of the virus has been intensified by the severe overcrowding in al-Mawasi, designated by the Israeli military as a "humanitarian zone," where population density reaches a staggering 30,000 individuals per square kilometer, with many residents living in tents.

Children under five are most at risk from the viral disease, most notably infants under two, since normal vaccination campaigns have been disrupted by the conflict.

The warning comes as over 40,400 Palestinians have been killed since October 7 in the Gaza war, and as patients evacuate al-Aqsa Martyrs Hospital in Deir al-Balah, the main hospital serving central Gaza, further burdening the already strained healthcare system in the region.

The area surrounding the hospital has been declared a military zone, the Health Ministry announced on Sunday night, causing panic and prompting many to flee the hospital, currently home to 100 patients, including seven in intensive care.

Despite the situation, the ministry confirmed that the medical center remains operational and that medical personnel have resumed their duties at the facility, urging for its protection.

Only 16 of Gaza's 36 hospitals are partially functioning, according to the World Health Organization. The United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) has also warned that the ongoing Israeli military attacks and repeated "evacuation orders" continue to impede the delivery of humanitarian aid in the Gaza Strip.

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