

WHO expresses concern about Gaza's degrading health care system as medical needs soar

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Geneva, December 17 (RHC)-- The biggest concern of the World Health Organization in Gaza is the "major degradation" of the local health system "at a time when the health needs are soaring," regional emergency director Richard Brennan told reporters. People in Gaza face a "toxic mix" of trauma, lack of

access to healthcare and increasingly infectious diseases and potentially hunger, he said.

The UN health official said that there are a massive number of patients at very few hospitals. Approximately 50,000 injured patients are currently overwhelming the reduced number of hospitals in Gaza, he said. "Prior to the conflict, there were 36 hospitals operating across Gaza. Now we have 11 partially operating hospitals and three, what we would call, 'minimally operating.' So, that with that massive new trauma load, you can just imagine the pressures that the doctors and nurses are working under," he said. He applauded the "incredible dedication" of medical staff working tirelessly over more than two months to provide care "in perhaps the toughest environment that I've ever experienced."

Poor sanitary conditions are also a major health problem. Richard Brennan said that over 80% of the strip's population has been displaced and shelters are overcrowded. Brennan also highlighted the poor hygiene conditions. "In some of these settlements, there's only one toilet for 300 to 400 people. So, you can imagine what the sanitation system is like," he said.

"We're seeing increased rates of infectious diseases such as respiratory infections, diarrhea, bloody diarrhea, which would give us concerns about dysentery, jaundice, which would give us concerns about hepatitis," he said.

The WHO official said that there are also "massive food deficits" in Gaza.

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