

HEALTH SITUATION IN GAZA

6 January 2009



World Health
Organization

OVERVIEW

This is an update on the health sector situation since the Israeli air strikes started on 27 December.

- 42 people were killed 6 Jan in an UNRWA school in an Israeli attack.
- All Gaza hospitals continue working on back-up generators for the fourth consecutive day.
- 24 Ministry of Health (MoH) Primary Health Care clinics (PHC) and four UNRWA PHC clinics were designated as emergency evacuation centres.
- On 5 January, 18 patients were evacuated through Rafah crossing, and 10 awaiting evacuation today.



International Humanitarian Law requires all medical personnel and facilities be protected at all times, even during armed conflict. Attacks on them are grave violations of International Humanitarian and Human Rights laws.

CASUALTIES

On 6 January, 42 people were killed following an attack on a UNRWA school transformed into a refugee site for displaced people. Dozens were injured and evacuated. This brings the total number of people killed to 619 since 27 December (41% children). At least 2550 Palestinians have been injured including 1134 children and women. The MoH reported that since Israel began its ground operation on 3 January, 109 persons have been killed.

HOSPITAL FUNCTIONING

Damage to hospitals and ambulances

No damage to hospitals or ambulances was reported 6 January; three ambulances have been damaged and three mobile clinics destroyed since 27 December. Six medical personnel have been killed. Fear of possible attacks on ambulances and medical personnel remains high.

There are 148 ambulances in the Gaza Strip. Of these, 19 include Intensive Care Units (ICUs), 92 are normal ambulances, three are 4-wheel drive and 34 for the transportation of health personnel. Three mobile clinics remain operational.

Electricity failure and fuel supply

Gaza City hospitals continue to depend on back-up generators. UNRWA and ICRC are working to supply fuel to keep generators running. Hospitals warn that the generators are close to collapse from lack of spare parts and have three days of fuel, even with services limited to mere essentials.

Health personnel

The ICRC team of emergency surgeons is working at Shifa hospital and two Norwegian doctors.

Some health personnel are working 24-hour shifts to try and meet needs. Health personnel are having increasing difficulty reaching their place of work. The ICRC and the UN are coordinating

with the IDF to secure passage for health staff between zones, which can take 5-6 hours.

Bed capacity and occupancy rate

Stabilized patients are discharged as soon as possible to free space in hospitals and ICUs but evacuation to NGO-run hospitals remains essential. Shifa hospital is trying to keep bed occupancy below 75% so to keep 25% of beds free for emergency cases. Non-governmental hospitals receiving patients include Ahli Arab hospital, Al Quds Palestinian Red Crescent Society hospital, Patients Friends Benevolent hospital, and El Awda hospital.

Primary health care centres

Gaza has 56 PHC clinics officially all functioning with interruptions and limitations due to:

- The proximity of battles (six MoH clinics were closed for this reason);
- Lack of staff due to redeployment of staff to hospitals to support emergency needs (no numbers are available at this point);
- Fear of getting out and reaching PHC clinics (no numbers available).

As part of the MoH emergency plan 24 PHC clinics and four UNRWA PHC clinics have been designated as emergency evacuation centres. All are active and ready to receive patients. No more information is available.

REFERRALS AND EVACUATIONS OUTSIDE GAZA

On 5 January, 18 patients were evacuated through the Rafah crossing for referral to hospitals in Egypt, Saudi Arabia and Libya. On 6 January, a further 10 patients were awaiting evacuation. So far 123 patients have been evacuated through Rafah, most for injuries and some for chronic conditions.

One patient was evacuated through Erez crossing on 5 January and 12 submitted requests to the Palestinian Liaison Officer for referral for cardiac and cancer care not available in the Gaza Strip. The Palestinian Referral Abroad Department remains closed.

MEDICAL SUPPLIES

Four trucks facilitated by WHO passed through Karem Shalom today carrying medical aid donations from the Greek and Turkish Governments.

COORDINATION

On 5 January, the Palestinian MoH in Ramallah with WHO collaboration began activities at its emergency operations room to respond to the health crisis. The operations room will provide assessments of requirements (pharmaceuticals, consumables, equipments and spare parts), follow up on the response of international community and address referrals of injured and other patients.

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