

Israel-Gaza Conflict



Explosions mark the backdrop of an informal camp settlement in Rafah, Gaza. Photo by Project HOPE staff, 2024.

Situation Report #6

January 22, 2024

Situation Update

After the October 7 attacks on Israel by Hamas, 1,200 people were killed, including 33 children, and 240 people were taken hostage. Since those horrific attacks, violence has spread throughout the region. Israel's military has killed Hamas and Hezbollah militants in Lebanon, Iran-backed Houthi rebels in Yemen have attacked shipping containers in the Red Sea, and missile attacks are raising tensions throughout the region.

Israel's military response to the October 7 attacks continues to have a catastrophic and devastating impact on the lives of Palestinians in Gaza. The ground incursion, drone attacks, and missile strikes are killing and injuring tens of thousands and severely limiting civilian access to food, water, safe housing, electricity, and health care.

More than 25,000 Palestinians in Gaza have been killed, 70% of whom are women and children, and more than 62,000 have been injured, according to the Ministry of Health.

Key Updates

- Project HOPE's primary health clinic in Deir al Balah, Gaza is seeing **up to 200 patients per day**, and has quickly scaled operations and staffing to meet the increased needs.
- Project HOPE **deployed a specialized care team of surgeons and emergency/trauma care nurses** to support Al Aqsa Hospital in Deir al Balah, Gaza in coordination with the World Health Organization. The team began providing care on Sunday, January 21 and a second specialized care team is slated to enter Gaza in late January.
- Through two local partners, Sharek Youth Forum and the Hakini Foundation, Project HOPE is **providing mental health care programs** to Palestinians in Gaza and the West Bank — who are dealing with the unimaginable combination of grief, trauma, uninterrupted acute stress, and the chaos of war.

The violence has also displaced nearly 2 million people from their homes. Nearly all Palestinians in Gaza are now living in dismal conditions, in informal camp settlements or abandoned buildings. In this environment, especially without access to proper hygiene and sanitation, food, clean water, electricity, or basic health care services, infectious diseases are likely to spread, thirst will continue to worsen, and the likelihood of famine will steadily increase unless a ceasefire is enacted and increased amounts of humanitarian aid are able to enter Gaza.

Humanitarian experts at the United Nations have determined that all of Gaza is experiencing food insecurity. In international crises, food insecurity is measured in five phases: Phase 1, Minimally Food Insecure; Phase 2, in Stress; Phase 3, in Crisis; Phase 4, in Emergency; and Phase 5, in Catastrophe, which is categorized by an acute malnutrition rate of over 30% and a daily mortality rate of more than two people for every 10,000 individuals.

In Gaza, current estimates have 25% of people facing Crisis, over 50% facing Emergency, and over 25% facing Catastrophe levels of food insecurity.

Rondi Anderson, Project HOPE's Senior Technical Advisor for Reproductive, Maternal, Newborn, and Child Health, states the following on the impact of food insecurity on the lives of pregnant women and newborns in Gaza:

"Malnutrition increases the risk of life-threatening complications in pregnancy in two critical ways. First, malnutrition leads to anemia, which means your blood isn't producing enough red blood cells. In extreme situations, pregnant women can die from anemia alone. More common, though, is that women with anemia are more susceptible to infections and post-partum hemorrhage, two of the leading causes of death in pregnant women. And if they do start hemorrhaging, they are more likely to die. Second, inadequate calories and protein lead to weight loss, which increases the risk of both prematurity and stillbirth."

Communication blackouts in Gaza have been near constant since January 12, complicating and delaying the coordination and delivery of aid, disrupting access to emergency support services, and severely limiting information sharing. This is the longest communications blackout that has occurred since the October 7 attacks and Israel's subsequent retaliation.

In addition, Palestinians in Gaza and the West Bank are enduring acute stress, processing unimaginable trauma, and grieving lost friends, family, and community members. This reality,



Project HOPE's medical coordinator, Dr. Santosh Kumar (center), delivering an ultrasound machine to Dr. Maram (right), a physician at our primary health clinic in Deir al Balah, Gaza. This equipment enables our team to provide urgently needed sexual and reproductive health services. Photo by Motaz Al Aaraj for Project HOPE, 2024.

combined with the ongoing violence and humanitarian crisis, is increasing the need for Psychological First Aid, mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS), and protection services.

Project HOPE's Response

More than three months into the Israel-Gaza conflict, Project HOPE's teams in Egypt, Gaza, and Israel continue to work with local authorities, UN agencies, and civil society to coordinate the delivery of aid to those impacted by the conflict and the worsening humanitarian crisis.

Last week, Project HOPE, in partnership with the Jordanian Health Aid Society – International (JHASi), deployed a team of specialized care providers – including six doctors and nurses, one reproductive and maternal child health specialist, and an operations specialist – into Gaza. The medical team within this unit has been dispatched to Al Aqsa Hospital in Deir al Balah, and has been providing care to patients since Sunday, January 21. In their first day at the hospital, the team completed 20 consultations, three general surgeries, and one orthopedic surgery. Currently, Project HOPE and JHASi plan to have a second team rotate in later this month.

Dr. Santosh Kumar, Project HOPE's medical coordinator and member of this specialized care unit, reported via satellite communications that one of the patients the team operated on was a 38-year-old mother of seven, who lost four children and her husband in a recent airstrike. One of her sons had two of his limbs amputated and she has a fractured tibia that had been set into place with plaster but required surgery since the bone had not yet fused. The Project HOPE and JHASi team were able to reset the bone with metal plates and are hopeful that the surgery will help the woman avoid a permanent physical disability.

In Gaza, Project HOPE staff continue to provide direct primary health care services at our clinic in Deir al Balah. Health workers at the clinic are seeing upwards of 200 people each day, with a current average of 160. As displaced families continue to arrive in Deir al Balah, Project HOPE has scaled up our operations and increased staffing to support the increased health needs of the community.

Additionally, Project HOPE has stocked the clinic with medicines and supplies from the first Interagency Health Kit (IEHK) that our team delivered to Rafah in December 2023. Project HOPE's local partner, Anera, has also supported the clinic with repeated donations of medicines and medical supplies and the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) has provided additional supplies, including Plumpynut, a Ready-to-Use Therapeutic Food (RUTF) for children impacted by food insecurity.



Project HOPE team members in front of our primary health clinic in Deir al Balah, Gaza, including Dr. Santosh Kumar, medical coordinator, (left of sign), Dr. Maram, physician, (right of sign), and Ibrahim, logistics officer (far left). Photo by Motaz Al Aaraj for Project HOPE, 2024.

Information sharing and communications with our team members in Deir al Balah has been limited due to the communications blackout. Despite this obstacle, Project HOPE's specialized support team was able to deliver a handheld ultrasound this week to our primary health clinic. This will allow our team of health workers, which includes a part-time gynecologist, to provide displaced families and pregnant women with urgently needed sexual and reproductive health care.

In both Gaza and the West Bank, Project HOPE has partnered with Sharek Youth Forum and Hakini Foundation – two local Palestinian organizations – to provide MHPSS services and activities to women and children. As of January 3, Sharek Youth Forum has provided more than 128 psychosocial group sessions in Rafah and Deir al Balah, reaching more than 3,200 Palestinian women and children.

In Israel, Project HOPE has provided MHPSS services and hygiene supplies to people displaced by the October 7 attacks and the subsequent conflict along the Israel-Lebanon border. Our local partners in Israel include the Yuri Shtern Center, which has supported displaced families in Jerusalem since early November and provided MHPSS services and touch therapy to 473 people since mid-December, and NATAL Israel, a local organization that has provided MHPSS services to more than 260 people in displacement centers in the past three weeks.

Project HOPE is also working to support hospitals near Israel's southern border by providing them with medical equipment and supplies and repairing damaged medical structures. The team has delivered a mobile ultrasound machine to Shamir Hospital in Be'er Ya'akov and procured five clinical defibrillator monitors for Barzilai Medical Center. At Barzilai, Project HOPE is also looking to support the rehabilitation of the Children's Developmental Institute, which was critically damaged by rocket fire in October, so that it can provide support to children with developmental challenges.

Our team has also successfully procured specialty wheelchairs for patients with spinal cord injuries at Sheba Medical Center and is working with Hadassah Hospital in Jerusalem to support the equipment needs of Gandel Rehabilitation Center, which will serve those injured in the conflict. Project HOPE is also looking to procure generators for the Emergency Dispatch Community Center in Netivot. Project HOPE staff continues to work with local health workers and local health facilities to determine the highest priority needs in affected communities, including medical supplies, equipment, rehabilitation needs, and MHPSS.

Project HOPE continues to act in coordination with partners in Israel, Gaza, Egypt, the West Bank, Jordan, and Lebanon to assess how and when we can best support the health and humanitarian needs of impacted communities, while remaining committed to the humanitarian principles of humanity, neutrality, impartiality, and independence.