

BABIES DYING OF PREVENTABLE CAUSES IN BESIEGED GAZA

Press Releases

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Premature births increase by up to a third in the last month

The collapse of Gaza's hospitals and healthcare system, coupled with the catastrophic living conditions, is resulting in babies dying of preventable causes, Oxfam warned today.

Newborns up to three months old are dying of diarrhoea, hypothermia, dehydration and infection as mothers have little to no medical support and are living in appalling conditions without water, sanitation, heat or food.

The aid agency said that the four-day humanitarian pause, if it happens, is too short and fragile to make any meaningful difference given the scale of need and destruction. Without essential equipment and medical support, premature and underweight babies have little to no chance of survival.

Oxfam partner Juzoor is one of a handful of organisations operating in northern Gaza, supporting 500 pregnant women among 35,000 people crammed into 13 shelters that have no clean water and sanitation, with up to 600 people sharing one toilet. They reported that in each of those shelters over the past month, at least one newborn died due to entirely preventable causes.

According to Juzoor's network of doctors, premature births have increased by between 25-30 per cent, as stressed and traumatised pregnant women face a myriad of challenges, such as walking long distances in search of safety, running away from bombs and being crowded

into shelters with squalid conditions. They have also reported that particularly in northern Gaza, cases of placenta abruption – a serious condition that occurs to pregnant women during childbirth and could be life-threatening to both the mother and baby - have more than doubled.

Umaiye Khammash, Juzoor Director said “Last month we lost at least one baby in every shelter, it’s heartbreaking. Access to hospitals is extremely dangerous and virtually impossible, so many women are having to give birth with little or no maternity support in shelters.

“Food is becoming really scarce, and I’m afraid that soon we will be out of stock completely. The absence of fuel has affected hospitals in the north and the shelters where we operate. There is no light, there is no heat. Now winter is coming and it’s cold. It is really a disaster for everyone, but especially for expectant mothers.”

Most hospitals in northern Gaza are not working due to the Israeli military attacks and the few remaining in the south are overwhelmed and lacking essential supplies. Even before the escalation of violence and heightened siege, the Gaza Strip had one of the highest neonatal mortality rates in the world accounting for 68 per cent of all infant deaths.

Sally Abi Khalil, Oxfam’s Middle East Regional Director, said:

“Amongst the horror and carnage in Gaza, we are now at the abhorrent stage of babies dying because of diarrhoea and hypothermia. It is shattering that newborns are coming into the world and due to the apocalyptic conditions, stand little chance of survival.

“Our partners are telling us that in some cases, mothers are having to give birth in classrooms full of 70 people, with no medical support, dignity or even basic hygiene. I don’t think there is anyone anywhere in the world that would disagree that is simply inhumane.”

Oxfam is working with Juzoor to support people in the 13 shelters in northern Gaza with hygiene kits and food. Juzoor has mobilized a team of 60 health professionals including doctors, nurses, midwives and psychologists to provide care. But the ongoing violence, siege and acute shortages of fuel and clean water severely hinder these efforts.

Oxfam is urgently calling for a full ceasefire and unimpeded humanitarian access via Israel and Egypt in order to restore vital services and provide desperately needed medical support particularly to pregnant women and newborn babies.

Ends

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Notes to the editor

- > Link to Juzour's voice interview and other material can be found [HERE](#).
- > Over 50,000 women in Gaza are currently pregnant. Of those, 5,500 are expected to give birth sometime in the next month – around 180 births every day, according to the Ministry of Health in Gaza. It is estimated that 30 per cent of women are likely to experience pregnancy or birth-related complications and will need additional medical care. Source: Juzour Maternal health report - 11 November, 2023.
- > Oxfam partner Juzoor has interviewed Dr. Nabil AlBarqouni, Chair of Gaza Neonatal Network who stated that there has been a 25-30 per cent overall increase in premature births this past month in Gaza.
- > Oxfam partner Juzoor has also interviewed Dr. Adnan Radi from Al-Awda Hospital who stated that hospitals particularly those in the North, have seen an increase in cases of placenta abruption among pregnant women, especially those that were subjected to direct bombings—approximately two to three times higher than the usual rate.
- > According to UNICEF, the first 28 days of a baby's life – the neonatal period – is the most vulnerable time for a child's survival. In 2021, the average global mortality rate was 18 deaths per 1,000 live births. Source: [UNICEF Neonatal Mortality Data](#)
- > [According to WHO](#) : In 2016, newborn deaths in the Gaza strip represented 68% of infant deaths.

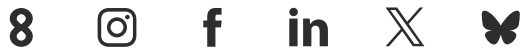
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