

Gaza: Repeated mass casualty events put hospitals under severe strain

Israel and the occupied territories Health



Gaza (ICRC) – The 60-bed Red Cross Field Hospital in Rafah, southern Gaza is nearly at full capacity following repeated mass casualty events. They include the attack in Al-Mawasi on Saturday that sent 26 injured patients into the facility for treatment, including children suffering from shrapnel wounds. It is the latest in a series of mass casualty events that Red Cross workers have responded to since May.

“The repeated mass casualty events resulting from the unrelenting hostilities have stretched to breaking point the response capacity of our hospital – and all health facilities in southern Gaza – to care for those with life-threatening injuries,” said Gaza head of sub-delegation for the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), William Schomburg. “Another mass casualty event would force our doctors and nurses to make extremely difficult choices. The current medical needs of civilians dramatically outstrip the limited availability of supplies and healthcare response, as hospitals have repeatedly been compelled to close.”

Many of the most serious injuries were shrapnel-related and patients will require multiple procedures and therapies to recover before they can be discharged from the hospital. Among those injured on Saturday include 10-year-old Ahmad Nahed, who was shopping for his family when he was hit by an explosion. He remembers waking up in the hospital hours later after surgery to remove shrapnel from his chest.

“The number of patients requiring resuscitation following Saturday’s influx of casualties is hard to imagine,” says Dr. Pankaj Jhaldiyil. “On Saturday, we had eight patients with severe life- and limb-threatening injuries who needed immediate surgeries. It is horrific to see. In these instances, we must respond rapidly.”

On top of the 26 patients rushed from Al-Mawasi to the Red Cross Field Hospital for treatment, we saw an additional 850 patients in the outpatient department last week, nearly half of whom are women and a third are children. Most of the patients have been displaced from their homes multiple times and are living with little food and clean water, in overcrowded areas, making it easier for them to fall sick.

Since the Red Cross Field Hospital opened in May, our team has provided 12,000 consultations and over 500 surgeries. Eighty percent of the procedures performed are for wounds directly linked to the armed conflict.

About the ICRC

The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) is a neutral, impartial and independent organization with an exclusively humanitarian mandate that stems from the Geneva Conventions of 1949. It helps people around the world affected by armed conflict and other violence, doing everything it can to protect their lives and dignity and to relieve their suffering, often alongside its Red Cross and Red Crescent partners.