

# GAZANS FACE THREAT OF CHOLERA AND OTHER INFECTIOUS DISEASES - OXFAM

Press Releases

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*Food, water, power all nearing exhaustion; Oxfam partners begin small distribution but scale of need and logistical chaos pose massive challenges to humanitarian response*

Gaza is facing an unprecedented health crisis that risks an outbreak of deadly infectious diseases, like cholera, because water and sanitation services have completely broken down, says Oxfam.

All five of Gaza's wastewater treatment plants and most of its 65 sewage pumping stations have been forced to close. Untreated sewage is now being discharged into the sea and, in some areas, solid waste is accumulating in the streets.

Clean water has now virtually run out. Some people are being forced to drink from farm wells. The UN Water and Sanitation cluster, of which Oxfam is a member, says that only three litres of water a day are now available per person in Gaza. The World Health Organisation recommends one person needs between 50-100 litres of water each day to meet basic health requirements.

Private vendors who run small water desalination or purification plants are now the biggest water suppliers. Oxfam staff say that the cost to buy water has increased five-fold.

Amitabh Behar, Oxfam International Interim Executive Director, said: "There is no power, no food and now no water in Gaza. It risks becoming a breeding ground for cholera and other diseases. The situation for civilians is already intolerable. Our staff are telling us that in some

cases, there are up to 70 people crammed into a single room. Humanitarian aid must be allowed into Gaza now.”

Despite the incredible difficulties, two local civil society organisations in Gaza have put together a plan to help people now crammed into shelters with hygiene kits and cash for food from one of the few supermarkets still open.

Oxfam is sending funds which they will spend on kits containing soaps, shampoo, sanitary pads and toothpaste, and cash for food for 800 households. Given households are now vastly inflated with extended family and squeezed into temporary shelters, including mosques and schools and hospitals, the aid will reach many times more that number.

A spokesperson from one of Oxfam’s partners, Palestine Medical Relief Society, talked to Oxfam today. Without wishing to be identified, she said:

“We’ve reached a point where midwives are having to assist in delivering babies over the phone, as there’s no security even in childbirth. Our plan is to deliver aid as soon as roads open up, we are just waiting for any sign to provide people in Gaza. We’re in constant contact with those on the ground, awaiting any chance to help.

“Aid in this situation is desperately needed, people are not just being killed in the attacks but also from diseases caused from unsanitary conditions, lack of food and the unhealthy conditions for both men, women and even children. Gazans are being forced to use unclean water, struggle to get enough food to feed themselves, and deal with severe shortages of essential medical supplies.

“Gaza once again far from safety, with not a single respite from the attack. People are dying each and every day, and living conditions have fallen to an all-time low. Despite these dreadful circumstances, there remains a ray of hope and determination to provide relief to the people of Gaza. PMRS is working on a plan to be prepared to act as soon as the routes open due to the huge number of phone calls received seeking for help in the most essential needs.”

Behar said “The commitment of our partners to help is inspiring. But no meaningful humanitarian response can happen without a stop to the violence. There must be a ceasefire now, and the immediate, unconditional release of everyone held captive by armed groups in Gaza, and the border crossings opened for aid.”

1.8 million people in Gaza are now food insecure, with the power shutdown hampering people’s ability to cook meals and for bakeries to produce bread. Refrigerators cannot work. The UN’s World Food Program has had to reduce its assistance by 60 per cent. All fishing activity and farming has stopped.

Oxfam is urgently calling safe access for humanitarian aid into Gaza and for distribution of it to be well coordinated and delivered first to those most in need.

Behar said “The chaotic nature of where displaced people are now, and the logistical and political challenges in allowing aid through the borders, gives us grave concern for their future,” he said. “This wait-and-see situation becomes a life-or-death situation.

“Civilians must not be targeted by any side – we need a ceasefire. The international community must address the root causes of the ongoing conflict, that being the occupation and blockade.”

## Ends

## Notes to editor

- Oxfam has available staff and partners voice testimonies, photos and B-roll at [HERE](#)
- Even before last weekend, the [UN](#) and humanitarian partners estimated that 2.1 million Palestinians across the Occupied Palestinian Territory (OPT) - including 80 per cent of the population in Gaza - depended on humanitarian assistance.
- Oxfam has been working in the Occupied Palestinian Territory and Israel since the 1950s and established a country office in the 1980s. We work with the most vulnerable communities in Gaza, East Jerusalem, and Area C, the 61 per cent of the West Bank where the government of Israel maintains full military and civil control.
- In Gaza, Oxfam works with partner organisations to help Palestinian women, men, and youth to improve their livelihoods and increase economic opportunities, combat gender-based violence and inequality and ensure access to basic needs and fundamental rights through our humanitarian work.

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