

World Health Organization announces three-day pause in Gaza war for polio vaccination

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An infant living with his displaced family in Deir al-Balah, Gaza, faces paralysis after contracting

polio. (Photo by Anadolu).

Geneva, August 30 (RHC)-- The Israeli military and Hamas have agreed to three-day pauses in fighting in the Gaza Strip to allow for the vaccination of some 640,000 children against polio, a senior UN World Health Organization official says.

Rik Peepkorn, WHO's representative in the Palestinian territories, said the so-called "humanitarian pauses" will start Sunday in central Gaza and last just eight or nine hours each day for three days. That will be followed by another similar pause in southern Gaza and then another in northern Gaza.

Noting that the campaign aims to vaccinate 640,000 children under 10, Peepkorn told reporters via video conference that health workers -more than 2,000 from UN agencies and Gaza's Health Ministry- might need additional days to complete the vaccinations.

"We need this humanitarian pause," he said, adding "And that has been very clear. We have an agreement on that, so we expect that all parties will stick to that."

The WHO stressed that at least 90% of children in Gaza should be vaccinated to stop the transmission of polio.

"I'm not going to say this is the ideal way forward. But this is a workable way forward," Peepkorn said of the humanitarian pauses. "It will happen and should happen because we have an agreement," he later added.

The agreement came after a 10-month-old baby was partially paralyzed by a mutated strain of the virus that vaccinated people shed in their waste. Abdel-Rahman Abu El-Jedian, who was born just before Israel's war on Gaza erupted on October 7, was one of hundreds of thousands of children who missed vaccinations because of the war.

The Palestinian resistance movement Hamas has already declared its supports for a polio vaccination in the besieged territory.

These humanitarian pauses are not a ceasefire deal in Gaza that mediators, including Qatar and Egypt, have been trying to secure in the past few weeks.

Meanwhile, Hamas emphasized that it's "ready to cooperate with international organizations to secure this campaign," according to a statement from Basem Naim, a member of the resistance movement's political bureau.

Israel launched the war on Gaza on October 7 after the Palestinian resistance movement Hamas waged the surprise Operation Al-Aqsa Storm against the occupying entity in response to the Israeli regime's decades-long campaign of bloodletting and devastation against Palestinians.

The regime's bloody onslaught on Gaza so far killed at least 40,602 Palestinians, mostly women and children, and injured 93,855 others. Thousands more are also missing and presumed dead under rubble.

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