

First children in Gaza given polio vaccines a day before planned UN rollout

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Gaza City, September 1 (RHC)-- Several children in Gaza have been given polio vaccines a day before a large-scale campaign to inoculate children against the virus and a planned pause in fighting in the besieged territory, Gaza's Health Ministry said.

Reporters from The Associated Press news agency saw roughly 10 infants receiving doses of vaccine in the Nasser Hospital in Khan Younis on Saturday afternoon.

“I was terrified and waiting for the vaccination to arrive and for everyone to receive it,” said Amal Shaheen, whose daughter received a dose. The WHO has confirmed that the official larger rollout of the vaccine will begin on Sunday.

The three-day vaccination campaign aims to reach some 640,000 Palestinian children and comes after the first polio case in 25 years in Gaza was discovered this month.

Reporting from Deir-el Balah, Al Jazeera’s Hani Mahmoud said the rollout was set to begin in central Gaza on Sunday. “The other days will be in Khan Younis and the last rollout will be in the northern part of the Strip,” Mahmoud added.

Israel has agreed to pause its military offensive in Gaza to allow health workers to administer the vaccines, UN officials have said.

Rik Peepkorn, WHO representative in the Palestinian territory, said on Thursday that the three pauses will take place from 6am to 3pm (03:00 to 12:00 GMT) and last for three days each in different areas of Gaza, beginning on Sunday. The pauses are unrelated to the continuing ceasefire negotiations.

“These are very momentary pauses from morning till mid-afternoon in each area. Considering the travel logistics for people in Gaza, this is not going to be easy for them to come and go safely,” Mukesh Kapila, a former WHO official, told Al Jazeera.

He added that Palestinian parents will be concerned for the safety of their children as Israeli attacks on health facilities have continued.

The humanitarian crisis in Gaza has deepened during Israel’s assault on the territory that began after a Hamas-led attack on southern Israel on October 7, which killed at least 1,139 people. Israel’s subsequent offensive has killed at least 40,691 people in Gaza.

On Saturday, the Palestinian Civil Defence agency in Gaza said at least three people were killed and dozens injured in an Israeli attack in the vicinity of the al-Ahli Arab Hospital (Baptist Hospital).

Al Jazeera’s Mahmoud said that in a previous attack at the hospital, hundreds of people were killed.

“This is not the first time we’ve seen health facilities being directly and deliberately targeted by the Israeli military. This particular hospital was attacked in the initial weeks of this war, and hundreds of people were killed as they were in the courtyard of the hospital,” he said.

The United States, Qatar and Egypt have spent months trying to mediate a ceasefire in Gaza that would also see the remaining captives released. But the talks have repeatedly bogged down as Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has promised “total victory” over Hamas and the Palestinian group has demanded a lasting ceasefire and a full Israeli withdrawal from the territory.

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