

Doctors Without Borders blames Israel's continuous destruction for polio outbreak in Gaza

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The photo shows a Palestinian baby in Gaza receiving the polio vaccine on September 1, 2024.

Gaza City, September 4 (RHC)-- The aid group Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF), also known as Doctors Without Borders, has stressed that Israel's strikes and decimation of Gaza's infrastructure were behind the polio outbreak in Gaza, calling for an immediate ceasefire in the besieged strip.

"The resurgence of polio in Gaza is a consequence of the continuous destruction of the infrastructure and health system by Israeli forces," MSF said in a statement. "The war has destroyed water and sanitation infrastructure, forced people into unhygienic and appalling living conditions, and disrupted routine vaccinations—perfect conditions for diseases like polio to spread," it added.

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 has so far killed at least 40,786 Palestinians, mostly women and children, and injured 94,224 others. Thousands more are also missing and presumed dead under rubble.

MSF statement came as a polio vaccination campaign has begun in Gaza after Israel agreed to eight-hour pauses in its strikes on designated sites in Gaza to allow health workers to vaccinate hundreds of thousands of Palestinian children against polio. The so-called "humanitarian pauses" began on Sunday in central Gaza and would last for three days.

That will be followed by another similar pause in southern Gaza and then another in northern Gaza. The campaign aims to vaccinate 640,000 children under 10.

MSF described the vaccination campaign as a "positive step", but stressed that "it is still a drop in the ocean compared to people's critical medical humanitarian needs." The aid group also called for "an immediate and sustained ceasefire to ensure people in Gaza have proper access to aid and health care."

"The campaign and announcement of military pauses during the vaccination campaign should not divert attention from the relentless violence and its impact on the delivery of humanitarian aid," MSF said, noting that "fewer than half of the hospitals in Gaza (16 of 36) are operational while people's medical needs are greater than ever."

The combat pauses 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 the first confirmed case in Gaza in 25 years, and one of hundreds of thousands of children who missed vaccinations because of the war.

According to MSF, its teams are providing logistical and organizational support for Gaza's Health Ministry and United Nations' vaccination campaign at five health facilities across Dayr al-Balah in central Gaza and Khan Yunis in southern Gaza.

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