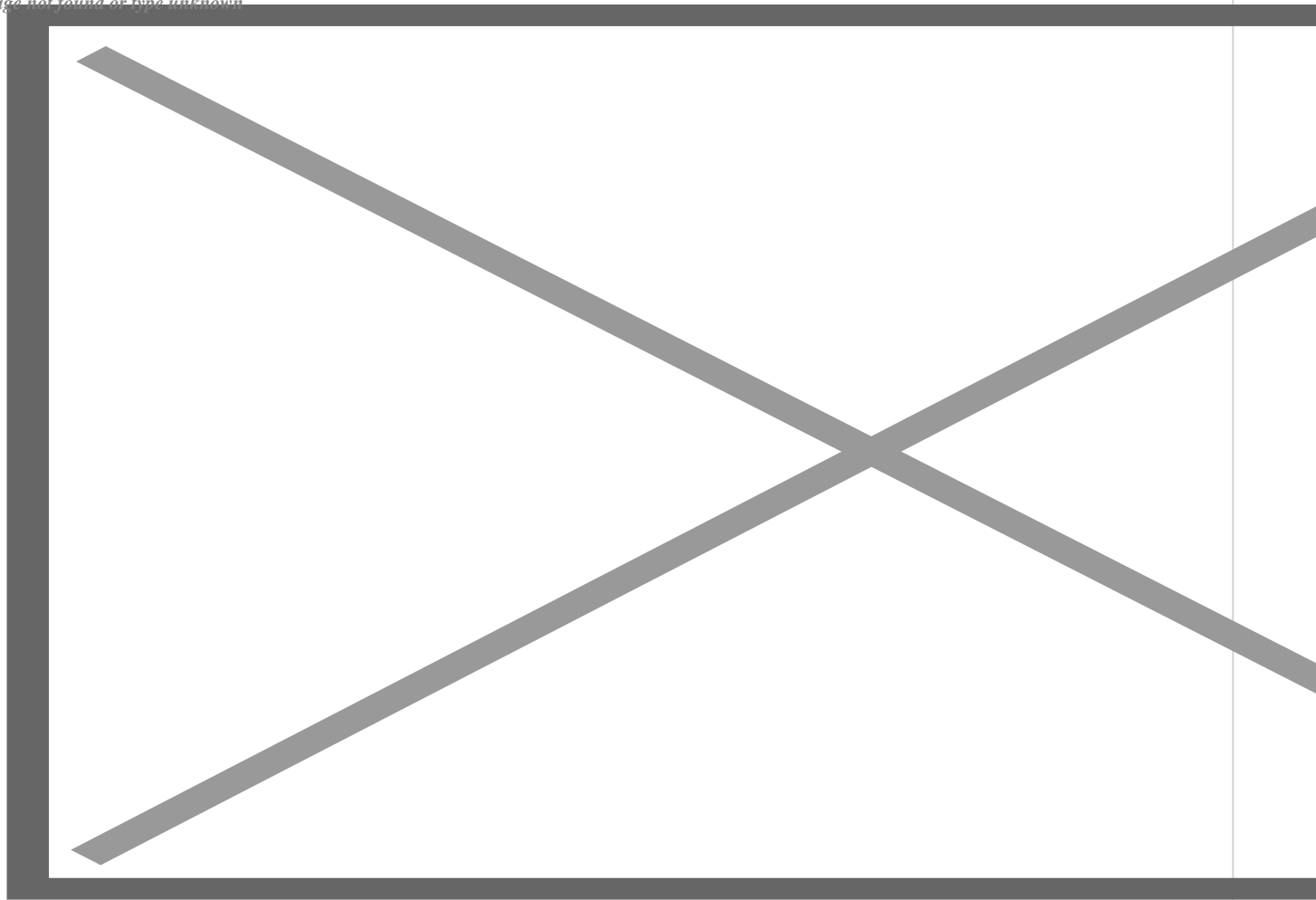


Gaza health system only days away from being overwhelmed by COVID-19

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Workers wearing protective gear and spray disinfectant as a precaution against the coronavirus, at the main market in Gaza City. (Photo: AP)

Gaza City, November 23 (RHC)-- Public health experts have warned that a sharp rise in the number of Palestinians infected with COVID-19 in the besieged Gaza Strip can overwhelm the impoverished

enclave's fragile health system.

"In 10 days the health system will become unable to absorb such a hike in cases and there might be cases that will not find a place at intensive care units," said Abdelraouf Elmanama, a microbiologist who is part of Gaza's pandemic task force, on Sunday.

He warned that the current 0.05 percent mortality rate among COVID-19 patients could rise, adding that 79 of the densely-populated enclave's 100 ventilators have been taken up by the COVID-19 patients.

On Sunday, the health ministry reported 684 new coronavirus cases and three more deaths. Also on Sunday, Abdelnaser Soboh, emergency health lead in the World Health Organization (WHO)'s Gaza sub-office, warned that "within a week, we will become unable to care for critical cases" in the enclave.

He added that the infection rate among those being tested had been 21 percent with a relative rise in carriers beyond the age of 60. "This is a dangerous indicator since most of (those over 60) may need to be hospitalized," Soboh said.

The Gaza Strip, home to two million people, has been under an Israeli-imposed land, air, and sea blockade since June 2007, after the Hamas resistance movement, which has vowed to resist Israeli occupation, won the elections and rose to power in the enclave.

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