WHO appeals for US$ 4.5 million for Gaza health response, mobilizes US$ 360 000 in emergency funds

17 July 2017 – Electricity cuts and continued shortages of medicines and medical supplies in the Gaza Strip are severely restricting the access of 2 million people to critical medical care, WHO has warned.

At least 30 hospitals, 70 primary health care centres and a blood blank are at risk of full or partial closure due to continued power outages and not enough fuel or spare parts for back-up generators.

“Without electricity, we have no ventilation during surgeries. This puts patients at increased risk of bacterial infections,” said Dr Marwan Abu Saada, Head of Surgery at Shifa Hospital.

Conditions quickly deteriorated after the closure of the Gaza Power Plant in mid-April and the reduction in the electricity supply from Israel to Gaza since late June.

Hospitals and health facilities face 18 to 20 hours of daily blackouts from the main grid.

This is having severe impacts on service delivery: reducing sterilization and cleaning of facilities; restricting access to desalinated water and diagnostic services; extending waiting times for surgery; and damaging equipment.

Essential medicines are also hard to come by. An estimated 36% of essential medicines and 32% of medical supplies are at zero stock levels or completely depleted.

The most vulnerable patients are particularly at risk; this includes adults and children suffering from cancer, phenylketonuria, cystic fibrosis, haemophilia, kidney failure, and hepatitis B and C.

Patients requiring treatment outside of Gaza are increasingly denied or delayed access to care by the Israeli authorities. On average in 2017, at least half (53%) of all applications for permits to exit Gaza through Erez checkpoint on medical grounds are routinely denied or delayed, according to the Palestinian Ministry of Health.

Fuel for generators is quickly running out. Available fuel stocks are unable to sustain lifesaving medical services beyond October 2017. Without functioning back-up generators, 113 newborns in neonatal intensive care, 100 patients in intensive care and 658 patients requiting haemodialysis twice or thrice a week will probably die.

The lack of fuel for electricity also has a severe impact on the supply of safe drinking-water and on the treatment and management of sewage. Access to clean water is becoming increasingly sporadic and the inability to treat raw sewage due to the electricity shortages poses a major public health hazard, increasing the risk of infectious diseases.

WHO has tapped into US$360 000 of internal emergency funds to scale up support to health authorities and prevent further deterioration of the health sector in Gaza. The funds will finance the purchase of fuel and life-saving drugs. WHO is also establishing an independent health sector monitoring system and leading the inter-agency response to health needs in Gaza.

“Deep power cuts, the lack of fuel for generators for hospitals, and the shortage in medicines and supplies are placing more lives at risk every day and bringing Gaza’s health sector to its knees,” said Dr Gerald Rockenshaub, head of WHO’s office in the occupied Palestinian territory. “We have received some internal funding to temporarily prevent a collapse of Gaza’s health system, but that is not enough. At least US$ 4.5 million in new humanitarian funding is needed to provide critical life-saving support to the health sector.”

The US$ 4.5 million required by WHO is part of an inter-agency appeal by health partners for US$ 8.5 million for priority interventions.

Access **GAZA CRISIS URGENT FUNDING APPEAL, July 2017**

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