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People in Gaza starving, sick and dying as aid blockade continues

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The risk of famine in Gaza is increasing with the deliberate withholding of humanitarian aid, including food, in the ongoing blockade.

The entire 2.1 million population of Gaza is facing prolonged food shortages, with nearly half a million people in a catastrophic situation of hunger, acute malnutrition, starvation, illness and death. This is one of the world's worst hunger crises, unfolding in real time.

The latest food security analysis was released today by the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC) partnership, of which WHO is a member.

"We do not need to wait for a declaration of famine in Gaza to know that people are already starving, sick and dying, while food and medicines are minutes away across the border," said WHO Director-General Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus. "Today's report shows that without immediate access to food and essential supplies, the situation will continue to deteriorate, causing more deaths and descent into famine."

Famine has not yet been declared, but people are starving now. Three quarters of Gaza's population are at "Emergency" or "Catastrophic" food deprivation, the worst two levels of IPC's five level scale of food insecurity and nutritional deprivation.

Since the aid blockade began on 2 March 2025, 57 children have reportedly died from the effects of malnutrition, according to the Ministry of Health. This number is likely an underestimate and is likely to increase. If the situation persists, nearly 71 000 children under the age of five are expected to be acutely malnourished over the next eleven months, according to the IPC report.

People in Gaza are trapped in a dangerous cycle where malnutrition and disease fuel each other, turning everyday illness into a potential death sentence, particularly for children. Malnutrition weakens the bodies, making it harder to heal from injuries and fight off common communicable diseases like diarrhoea, pneumonia, and measles. In turn, these infections increase the body's requirement for nutrition, while reducing nutrient intake and absorption, resulting in worsening malnutrition. With health care out of reach, vaccine coverage plummeting, access to clean water and sanitation severely limited, and increased child protection concerns, the risk of severe illness and death grows, especially for children suffering from severe acute malnutrition, who urgently need treatment to survive.

Pregnant and breastfeeding mothers are also at high risk of malnutrition, with nearly 17 000 expected to require treatment for acute malnutrition over the next eleven months, if the dire situation does not change. Malnourished mothers struggle to produce enough nutritious milk, putting their babies at risk, while the delivery of counselling services for mothers is heavily compromised. For infants under six months, breastmilk is their best protection against hunger and disease – especially where clean water is scarce, as it is in Gaza.

The long-term impact and damage from malnutrition can last a lifetime in the form of stunted growth, impaired cognitive development, and poor health. Without enough nutritious food, clean water, and access to health care, an entire generation will be permanently affected.

The plan recently announced by Israeli authorities to deliver food and other essential items across Gaza via proposed distribution sites is grossly inadequate to meet the immediate needs of over two million people. WHO echoes the UN's call for the global humanitarian principles of humanity, impartiality, independence and neutrality to be upheld and respected and for unimpeded humanitarian access to be granted to provide aid based on people's needs, wherever they may be. A well-established and proven humanitarian coordination system, led by the UN and its partners, is already in place and must be allowed to function fully to ensure that aid is delivered in a principled, timely, and equitable manner.

The aid blockade and shrinking humanitarian access continue to undermine WHO's ability to support 16 outpatient and three inpatient malnutrition treatment centres with life-saving supplies, and to sustain the broader health system. The remaining supplies in WHO's stocks inside Gaza are only enough to treat 500 children with acute malnutrition – a fraction of the urgent need – while essential medicines and supplies to treat diseases and trauma injuries are already running out and cannot be replenished due to the blockade.

People are dying while WHO and partners' life-saving medical supplies sit just outside Gaza – ready for deployment, with safeguards in place to ensure the aid reaches those who need it most in line with humanitarian principles. WHO calls for the protection of health care and for an immediate end to the aid blockade, which is starving people, obstructing their right to health, and robbing them of dignity and hope. WHO calls for the release of all hostages, and for a ceasefire, which leads to lasting peace.