

Israel-Hamas war

Doctors and health officials report wave of hunger deaths in Gaza

Health ministry says dozens have died this month as aid agencies warn that even their workers are suffering from malnutrition



A two-year-old boy suffering from severe malnutrition is held by his mother at a refugee camp near Gaza City © Haitham Imad/EPA/Shutterstock

Heba Saleh in Cairo

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Doctors and local health authorities in Gaza have reported a wave of deaths from starvation and malnutrition across the enclave after months of Israeli restrictions on the entry of most food and humanitarian supplies.

Gaza's health ministry on Wednesday recorded 10 deaths due to starvation in the previous 24 hours, which it said brought the number of hunger-related fatalities in July to 46.

That brings the total number of deaths from malnutrition reported by the ministry to 111, at least 80 of them children, since Israel's offensive in [Gaza](#) started following Hamas's October 7 2023 attack.

More than 100 international aid organisations and rights groups, including [MSF](#) and Oxfam International, warned on Wednesday that the world was watching as "mass starvation spreads across Gaza".

Saeed Salah, a paediatrician and director of the Patient's Friends Benevolent Society Hospital in Gaza City, told the Financial Times that, as of Tuesday, five children under five had died of malnutrition in recent days and that eight others were being treated for the condition.

He said the hospital had run out of the nutritional supplements previously provided by the World Health Organization. Israel attacked the UN agency's facilities in Gaza three times on Monday, including its main warehouse in Deir al-Balah.



A mother cries over the body of her three-month-old baby, who died of malnutrition at Nasser Hospital in Khan Younis, Gaza, on Sunday © Hatem Khaled/Reuters

Salah said the mothers of infants suffering from malnutrition had generally not eaten for days and were unable to produce milk to breastfeed.

“We don’t have enough nutritional materials or treatments to offer,” he said. “We are making do with what we have. Even our staff members have been weakened by malnutrition.”

In their statement on Wednesday, the aid groups said their colleagues in Gaza were now running out of food: “With supplies now totally depleted, humanitarian organisations are witnessing their own colleagues and partners waste away before

organisations are witnessing their own colleagues and patients waste away before their eyes.”

They said governments should demand an immediate and permanent ceasefire and the opening of all crossings into Gaza to allow the entry of food and humanitarian supplies.

States must pursue “concrete measures”, they added, including “halting the transfer of weapons and ammunition” to end Israel’s siege on the shattered enclave, where 2.1mn people are trapped under daily bombardment.

Unicef, the UN’s children’s agency, warned on Monday that deadly malnutrition among children was reaching “catastrophic levels”. Doctors say many of the hunger-related deaths come from infections that affect severely malnourished people.

Nick Bryant, a British surgeon who was working as a volunteer at Nasser Hospital in Khan Younis in southern Gaza until Sunday, said four premature newborn babies had died at the hospital in recent weeks from malnutrition. Their mothers were too weak to produce milk and the hospital did not have enough formula to give them.

He added that many adult patients also came in severely malnourished and were failing to heal from post-operative infections.





A cart carries people to hospital after they were injured as they tried to get humanitarian aid near Rafah on Sunday
© AFP/Getty Images

On Monday, 28 countries, including the UK, Canada and Japan, [condemned the “drip feeding of aid”](#) in Gaza, as they demanded an immediate end to the war.

The EU this month signed a deal with Israel to increase aid to Gaza, but aid agencies report no difference in access.

Though some countries such as the UK have placed sanctions on far-right Israeli ministers, they have faced growing domestic pressure to take broader measures, including imposing economic sanctions and ending weapons sales.

Israel, which imposed a blockade on Gaza in March, has since May only allowed the UN and other humanitarian groups to bring in a trickle of supplies, far below the needs of the enclave.

It has instead backed a controversial US scheme, run by the Gaza Humanitarian Foundation, to distribute food at four centres in military zones concentrated in the south and guarded by security contractors and the Israeli military.

Since the scheme began at the end of May, local authorities say [hundreds of Palestinians have been killed](#) in attacks by the Israeli army on their way to the chaotic centres.

The Israeli military has acknowledged firing on multiple occasions, but has claimed it did so after people approached troops in a way they deemed threatening.

Israel denies that it is restricting aid and blames Hamas for diverting supplies.

But the UN has criticised the GHF scheme as a weaponisation of aid aimed at displacing the population of Gaza to the south of the strip, a goal outlined by Israeli leaders.

UN secretary-general António Guterres on Tuesday described the situation in Gaza as a “horror show”. “We are seeing the last gasp of a humanitarian system built on

humanitarian principles,” he told the Security Council.

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