

6 babies freeze to death in 2 weeks in Gaza

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At least six babies have frozen to death over the past two weeks in Gaza, amid a continued blockade of fuel and humanitarian aid by the illegal Israeli occupation.

Doctors at the Patient's Friends Benevolent Society hospital in Gaza City said that five infants had died in their hospital alone from hypothermia over this period.

"The last several weeks we [had] nine neonates in our hospital. And they came with a case that they call 'cold injury' or hypothermia," Dr. Samer Lubad, a pediatrician at the hospital, told Al Jazeera.

"Three babies survived and were treated successfully and discharged home. There is still one baby in our neonatal ICU in a critical general condition," he added. "Of course, this condition is because of the cold weather and lack of safe shelters, lack of central heating, and lack of electricity in the Gaza Strip."

Overnight Monday, a two-month-old girl froze to death in Khan Younis, the head of the pediatric department at the Nasser Hospital in Khan Younis said.

The girl, Sham Yousef al-Shambari, was buried by her father and uncle after her mother found her "stiff as wood from the cold" in their family's tent.

Obaida al-Shanbari, the girl's uncle, said that "Her body turned into a piece of ice ... and her heartbeat stopped," in a phone interview with the *Washington Post*.

Muneer al-Boursh, a director general of the Gaza health ministry, said in a statement that 15 children had frozen to death over the winter.

He said that Israel had "failed to comply with humanitarian protocols, including allowing the entry of medical equipment, heating supplies, tents, and mobile homes" agreed to as part of the ceasefire that began on January 19.

The vast majority of Gaza's population of 2.1 million people has been displaced multiple times and 70 percent of buildings in the enclave have been destroyed or damaged.

Over the past two weeks, temperatures have repeatedly dropped to as low as 3 degrees Celsius.

Only half of Gaza's hospitals are even partially functional and all face shortages of energy, supplies and critical equipment.

"Newborns should not be dying of hypothermia in Gaza. This is not a tragedy of nature but a man-made crisis," Fikr Shalltoot, Gaza director for the London-based charity Medical Aid for Palestinians, told the *Washington Post*.

She added, "If adequate aid, including shelter supplies, were allowed to reach civilians and hospitals, these deaths would be entirely preventable. This suffering is the direct result of Israel's restrictions on essential humanitarian aid."

Saeed Salah, director of the Patient's Friends Benevolent Society Hospital in northern Gaza, told the *Washington Post*, "All of these children arrived with low temperatures, shortness of breath, and cold extremities that reached the point of freezing."

"These children live with their families in tents and destroyed homes and suffer from a lack of supplies that help provide them with the necessary warmth, especially with the Israeli intransigence in bringing in the necessary fuel," Salah said.

"My children are in pain and I'm helpless. I cannot afford to buy them clothes or blankets," Manal Alsosi, a refugee in Gaza, told Al Jazeera. "A tent does not protect you from the cold or the rain in winter. We are suffering day and night," she said.

"The cold weather has a catastrophic impact on hundreds of thousands of Palestinians living in tents and temporary shelters, especially with the lack of heating and basic supplies to protect against rain and strong winds," Hosni Mahna, a spokesperson for the Gaza municipality, told Al Jazeera.

He added, "There is an acute shortage of tents. In the Gaza and North governorates alone, we need at least

120,000 tents to temporarily shelter residents who have lost their homes, but what has been delivered so far covers only 10 percent of the actual need.”

Hanan Balkhy, regional director for the Eastern Mediterranean at the World Health Organization, said in a statement that “The health system is ruined. Malnutrition is rising. The risk of famine persists. ... We are ready to scale up our response, but we urgently need systematic and sustained access to the population across Gaza, and we need an end to restrictions on the entry of essential supplies.”

Responding to the deaths of the infants, Stephane Dujarric, spokesperson for UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres, demanded that Israel allow housing and fuel into the Gaza Strip. “My understanding from our humanitarian colleagues is that there’s been a lot of challenges in getting tents and caravans and tarpaulins in. We continue to push. Some are going in but we need more.”

The horrific revelations of infant deaths come amid continued revelations of the systematic torture of doctors and medical staff by Israeli officials.

In an interview with the *Guardian*, 63-year-old Abu Ajwa, a doctor at al-Ahli Arab hospital in central Gaza, said he was systematically tortured for months by Israeli officials. “There was a bathroom [in the interrogation room] ... [they] would take a toilet brush and tell me ‘today we are going to brush your teeth.’ I was tied up, blindfolded and three or four of them held my face, pinned it down and kept scrubbing.”

Since the start of the Gaza genocide, over 1,000 medical staff have been killed amid the systematic destruction of Gaza’s medical system.

At the same time, Israeli forces continue to rampage throughout Gaza, with at least 50 Palestinians killed in the West Bank since January 21.

The Israeli army, which is carrying out military operations in the Jenin refugee camp, is blocking residents from returning to their homes, effectively expanding the mass displacement in Gaza to portions of the West Bank.

A statement from Human Rights Watch (HRW) condemned the ongoing displacement of Palestinians from sections of the West Bank, declaring, “States should act to prevent atrocities and allow Palestinians to return to their homes.”

Earlier this month, US President Donald Trump

called for the ethnic cleansing of Gaza’s Palestinian population. He declared that the Gaza Strip “should not go through a process of rebuilding and occupation by the same people that lived a miserable existence there.” Trump called for “other countries” to “build various domains that will ultimately be occupied by the 1.8 million Palestinians living in Gaza.”

Last week, Israeli Defense Minister Israel Katz ordered the creation of a directorate in the Defense Ministry tasked with overseeing the implementation of Trump’s proposal. “The plan includes extensive assistance that will allow any Gaza resident who wants to emigrate to a third state to receive support, including special departure arrangements through sea, air, and land,” the Defense Ministry stated.



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