

Israeli Assault Causing Disease, Hunger to Rapidly Spread Across Gaza

By [Julia Conley](#)

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With roughly [90% of Gaza residents](#) displaced and seeking safety from Israel's bombardment and ground attacks, crowding into shelters in cities including the already densely populated Rafah, humanitarian agencies warned Tuesday that the spread of disease and the risk of starvation are showing no signs of slowing down in the blockaded enclave.

A week after the World Food Program (WFP) [warned](#) that about "half of Gaza's population is starving," the United Nations organization's chief economist said Tuesday that less than three months into Israel's relentless assault, the territory appears to meet at least one of the criteria for famine.

About 20% of the population faces an "extreme lack of food," Arif Husain [told](#) *The New York Times*.

"I've been to pretty much any conflict, whether Yemen, whether it was South Sudan, northeast Nigeria, Ethiopia, you name it," Husain told the newspaper. "And I have never seen anything like this, both in terms of its scale, its magnitude, but also at the pace that this has unfolded."

Skipping meals, particularly among adults caring for children, has become "the norm" in Gaza, the WFP said on social media.

👁👁👁👁 🗣🗣🗣🗣: Everyone in [#Gaza](#) is hungry! Skipping meals is the norm, and

each day is a desperate search for sustenance.

People often go the entire day and night without eating. Adults go hungry so children can eat.

Read More <https://t.co/8lEDge22Wh> pic.twitter.com/W1CHYAnIzK

— WFP Media (@WFP_Media) [January 2, 2024](#)

Experts on Gaza's humanitarian crises—which gripped the enclave even before Israel began bombing Gaza in retaliation for Hamas' attack in October—are among those suffering, the *Times* reported, with International Crisis Group analyst Azmi Keshawi telling the newspaper that he is one of thousands of displaced people who has to go searching daily for sustenance to feed his family.

“Our daily nightmare is to go hunt for food,” Keshawi, who is sheltering with his family in a tent on a street in Rafah, told the *Times*. “You cannot find flour. You cannot find yeast to make bread. You cannot find any kind of food—tomatoes, onions, cucumbers, eggplant, lemon, orange juice.”

Human Rights Watch [said](#) last month that Israel is using starvation as a method of warfare—a war crime under the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court.

The lack of nourishment has put residents at heightened health and safety risks as many are sleeping out in the open without adequate clothing or blankets to keep out the elements, as colder winter weather arrives.

Along with the growing hunger crisis, the United Nations has been monitoring the spread of communicable diseases and healthcare workers' inability to adequately care for people due to Israel's blockade and refusal to allow in adequate aid.

The World Health Organization (WHO) [reported](#) that there have been 179,000 cases of acute respiratory infections; 136,400 cases of diarrhea—the second-leading cause of death among young children worldwide—in children under age five; and 55,400 cases of scabies since mid-October.

The organization said Gaza is at “imminent risk” of more disease outbreaks.

The severe overcrowding of cities and shelters, where displaced people have the use of [one toilet for every 700 people](#) on average, has contributed to the rapid spread of illnesses.

“Gazans can die very easily now because of the diseases spreading,” Tamara Alrifai, director of external relations at the U.N. Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA), told *Channel 4 News* in the United Kingdom on Tuesday. “Originally a home for around 280,000 people, over the last few weeks, about a million additional people came into Rafah and that explains that visual element of extremely crowded shelters but also extremely crowded spaces around the UNRWA shelters.”

"Gazans can die very easily now because of the diseases spreading" [@TamaraAlrifai](#) tells [@Channel4News](#) that disease is spreading

among the overcrowded shelters and packed streets of Rafah in southern [#Gaza](#), one of the most crowded places on the planet. pic.twitter.com/0TbhZhCslj

— UNRWA (@UNRWA) [January 2, 2024](#)

Dr. Guillemette Thomas, a medical coordinator for Doctors Without Borders, [told](#) the *Times* that Israel is now allowing 120 aid trucks at most into Gaza each day. For weeks no shipments were allowed in, and desperately needed [fuel](#) did not reach Gaza until late November. Before the bombardment and blockade, many Gazans relied on aid that was brought in by 500 trucks per day.

Despite Israeli Defense Minister Yoav Gallant's proclamation on October 9 that he was [ordering](#) a "complete siege on the Gaza Strip" with "no electricity, no food, no fuel" allowed in for its residents, who he referred to as "human animals," Israel continues to claim that it is not blocking aid or targeting civilians. The government has claimed Hamas is diverting aid deliveries, an accusation that UNRWA Commissioner-General Philippe Lazzarini called "baseless."

At least [22,185 people](#) have been killed and at least 57,000 have been injured in Gaza since Israel began its bombardment, with an additional 7,000 people reported missing or presumed to be buried under rubble.

Last week, the UNRWA posted a video on social media showing people desperately trying to reach an aid convoy in Gaza City.

[#Gaza](#) is just weeks away from [#Famine](#)
People are desperate and hungry
To prevent famine, more, much more food + other basics must be allowed in
□ safe access, □ a humanitarian [#Ceasefire_In_Gaza](#) so we can deliver aid
Thx [@cnni](#) for the video □ <https://t.co/gdG1hsxldS>

— UNRWA (@UNRWA) [December 30, 2023](#)

"Gaza is just weeks away from famine," said the agency. "People are desperate and hungry. To prevent famine, more, much more food and other basics must be allowed in."

The group also reiterated its call for a humanitarian cease-fire to allow aid deliveries and protect civilians.

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Julia Conley is a staff writer for Common Dreams.

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