



15 YEARS OF BLOCKADE AND HEALTH IN GAZA

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How has 15 years of blockade affected health in Gaza?



Severe restrictions on people's movement and limitations on the entry and exit of supplies have negatively impacted conditions of life that determine health for Palestinians in the Gaza Strip. Rising unemployment, food insecurity and poverty are detrimental to health, and have been accompanied by obstacles affecting the adequate provision of clean water and sanitation that are essential for health protection.

Barriers to accessing health care arise from constraints on movement affecting patients, companions, and health care workers; limitations and inequities affecting medical supplies and equipment; and gaps in protection that contributed to **645 attacks on health care in the Gaza Strip since 2018**.

Can patients from Gaza freely access hospitals in the rest of the occupied Palestinian territory?

No.

Israel implements a permits regime that restricts access for Palestinian patients and their companions. From 2008 to 2022, of permit applications by patients, **over 70,000 or a third (30%) were delayed or denied**. For patient companion permit applications, nearly 115,000 or 44% were delayed or denied in the same period.



How do access restrictions affect health in Gaza?

If approved permits to travel, patients are allowed just one companion to accompany them. Young adult men and women face greater obstacles to obtaining permits, so children often travel unaccompanied by their parents. From 2018 to 2021, **43% of children approved permits to travel did not have approval of one of their parents as a companion**.

Delay and denial of permits means worse health outcomes for patients. As well as stress and anxiety associated with unpredictable permits processes, delayed access for patients means higher mortality. Cancer patients from Gaza initially delayed or denied permits for chemotherapy or radiotherapy from 2015 to 2017 were **1.5 times less likely to survive in the coming months and years**.¹



¹ <https://journals.plos.org/plosone/article?id=10.1371/journal.pone.0251058>

What about access for health staff and medical supplies?

Barriers to access for health staff limit opportunities for continuous professional development. Since 2016, of permit applications submitted through WHO for health partners, **nearly two-thirds (64%) were not approved**.

Restrictions and delays on entry for medical supplies limit health care availability in the Gaza Strip. In 2021, for example, of requests for entry of x-ray/CT spare parts or equipment, **69% were denied**.



How can the situation be improved?

The World Health Organization and partner organizations of the Health Cluster for the occupied Palestinian territory are calling for **an immediate end to the blockade of the Gaza Strip**.

WHO made recommendations to the 75th World Health Assembly for improving health conditions in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem.²

Recommendations to Israel:

- **End the arbitrary delay and denial of permits for Palestinian patients** in need of essential care and ensure unhindered access for patients and their companions.
- **End the arbitrary delay and detention of ambulances and health care staff** at checkpoints and the arbitrary arrest of health care workers and ensure that Palestinian health care providers can work unobstructed throughout the occupied Palestinian territory.
- **Facilitate entry of all essential medicines and medical supplies**, including through simplification of administrative requirements and processes.
- **Ensure respect for, and protection of, medical personnel and medical facilities**, as required by international humanitarian law, and refrain from acts of intimidation.
- **Respect, protect and fulfil underlying determinants of health** for Palestinians in the Gaza Strip, including through ending movement restrictions and refraining from the use of excessive force.

Recommendations to the Palestinian Authority and international community:

- **Prioritize health care expenditure** to ensure the continuity of essential health care services across the occupied Palestinian territory.
- **Simplify and streamline the referrals system** to promote accessibility and transparency for patients, including through identifying and promoting understanding of patient entitlements.
- **Promote monitoring and reporting to strengthen transparency, equity, and accountability** in health care provision to the population in the occupied Palestinian territory.
- **Work to protect underlying determinants of health** for Palestinians, including through investment in related sectors and the Palestinian economy.
- **Support efforts to strengthen the protection of Palestinians from violations**, including those affecting health care, and work to uphold accountability under international law.

Please share this message and the voices of Palestinians living under blockade in the Gaza Strip.

² https://apps.who.int/gb/ebwha/pdf_files/WHA75/A75_26-en.pdf