

Second stage of Gaza polio campaign begins while war goes on in other areas

Reuters – Crowds of Palestinians gathered at medical centers in the south of the embattled Gaza Strip on Thursday to have their children vaccinated against polio, the start of the second stage of a campaign that has so far seen 187,000 youngsters inoculated.

The U.N. Palestinian refugee agency UNRWA said the campaign, facilitated by Hamas and Israel agreeing on limited pauses in their fighting, was so far successful but complex.

But the war continued elsewhere in the enclave, with Gaza health authorities reporting several people killed in Israeli airstrikes, including a hit on a hospital in central Gaza.

And despite the success of the polio campaign, diplomatic efforts to secure a permanent ceasefire in the war, the release of hostages held in Gaza, and the return of Palestinians jailed by Israel have faltered.

On Thursday, vaccinations began in Rafah and Khan Younis in the south of Gaza, both areas that have been battered by the war and have hosted tens of thousands of people who have fled other parts.

“The #polio vaccination campaign has moved to #Gaza southern areas today. @UNRWA teams are in Khan Younis this morning, working with partners to provide the vaccine to children,” UNRWA said in a statement.

“At this critical time, area pauses must be respected to protect families and humanitarian workers,” it said.

Most of the activity will be conducted in Khan Younis and will

include residents who had been forced by the Israeli military to leave Rafah, near the border with Egypt, where Israeli forces have been operating since May.

The Israeli military said it has killed hundreds of Palestinian gunmen in Rafah and located dozens of tunnels and military infrastructure in that time.

Health officials aim to reach 640,000 Gaza children for vaccinations against polio in a campaign launched after the discovery of a case in which a one-year-old baby was partially paralyzed.

This was the first known case of the disease in Gaza – one of the world’s most densely populated places – in 25 years. It re-emerged as Gaza’s health system has virtually collapsed and many hospitals have been knocked out of action due to the war.

Footage circulated by the Gaza Health Ministry showed large crowds of Palestinians arriving at medical facilities in Khan Younis to get their children vaccinated.

UNRWA said on Wednesday good progress was being made in rolling out the vaccine to children in Gaza but a permanent ceasefire in the 11-month-old war is needed to ease humanitarian suffering.

DEADLOCK AND FIGHTING

Meanwhile, Israeli forces pressed on with operations in several areas across the Palestinian enclave, battling fighters from Hamas and the Islamic Jihad militant group.

Gaza health officials said an Israeli airstrike killed five Palestinians at the Al-Aqsa Hospital in Deir Al-Balah in the central Gaza Strip on Thursday.

The victims were in a tent encampment inside the hospital compound where displaced people had sought shelter, they said.

The Israeli military said the airstrike hit a command center there used by Hamas and the Islamic Jihad to plan and direct attacks against Israeli forces.

On the diplomatic front, the United States was trying to put forward a new proposal for a ceasefire and the release of hostages held by Hamas in the coming days, two U.S. officials, two Egyptian security sources, and an official with knowledge of the matter told Reuters.

The proposal aims to work out the major sticking points behind a months-long impasse in talks mediated by the United States, Qatar, and Egypt, the U.S. officials said.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu says the war can only end when Hamas is eradicated. Hamas wants any agreement ending the war to include a withdrawal of all Israeli forces from Gaza.

The war in Gaza was triggered by Hamas' Oct. 7 attack on southern Israel, when its fighters killed 1,200 people and captured more than 250 hostages, according to Israeli tallies.

Since then, more than 40,800 Palestinians have been killed in Gaza, according to the enclave's health ministry.

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