

URGENT ALERT ON THE RECENT DETECTION OF POLIO VIRUS AND IMMINENT OUTBREAK IN GAZA

17 August 2024

Juzoor for Health and Social Development urgently calls attention to the catastrophic conditions in Gaza that are fueling the resurgence of preventable, life-threatening diseases

On 16 August 2024, the Ministry of Health in the Gaza Strip confirmed the first case of polio in a 10-month-old child, only weeks after the region was declared a “polio epidemic zone” following the detection of the virus in wastewater samples.

For the past 10 months, Israel’s relentless assault on Gaza has led to devastating and appalling humanitarian conditions. The destruction of infrastructure, the collapse of the healthcare system, and severe restrictions on essential supplies have made life in Gaza uninhabitable. As these dire conditions persist, the outbreak of preventable communicable diseases is becoming increasingly inevitable.

Polio, a highly contagious disease, primarily affects young children under five years old, with infants being particularly vulnerable. The virus attacks the nervous system, potentially causing irreversible spinal and respiratory paralysis, which can be fatal.

Gaza had been polio-free for over 25 years, with vaccination rates consistently high up until last October. However, the ongoing genocidal war by Israel has severely disrupted routine vaccination programs for Gaza’s half a million children. According to

the Global Polio Eradication Initiative, the coverage for the crucial second dose of the polio vaccine has plummeted from 99% in 2022 to below 90% in the first quarter of 2024, and it has since likely declined further, with some areas in Gaza having entirely lost access to any kind of vaccination at all.

The resurgence of diseases like polio underscores the devastating impact of the destruction of Gaza’s water and sanitation systems. Combined with widespread malnutrition, displacement, and a near-total collapse of healthcare services, these factors have created a breeding ground for communicable diseases.

In response to this crisis, leading global organizations, including the WHO and the UN, are calling for an immediate humanitarian pause to facilitate a critical vaccination campaign against polio.

As Juzoor remains on the ground in Gaza, providing vital health services and essential supplies to nearly half a million Palestinians, we remain gravely concerned about the imminent threat of an outbreak and the potential for additional disease outbreaks in the wake of this ongoing health and humanitarian catastrophe.

Juzoor emphasizes calls for an immediate ceasefire as the only true solution to halt disease outbreaks and prevent further unimaginable loss of life in Gaza