

# Attacks on hospitals and health workers jeopardize provision of health in Lebanon

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Since the escalation of hostilities between Israel and Lebanon on 17 September 2024, WHO has verified 23 attacks on health care in Lebanon that have led to 72 deaths and 43 injuries among health workers and patients. Fifteen incidents impacted health facilities, while 13 impacted health transport. Hospitals in Lebanon are already under massive strain as they strive to sustain essential health services while dealing with an unprecedented influx of injured people. Understaffed and under-resourced, the health system has been struggling to maintain uninterrupted services to all those in need with supplies being depleted and health workers exhausted.

Increasing conflict, intense bombardment and insecurity are forcing a growing number of health facilities to shut down, particularly in the south. Out of 207 primary health care centres and dispensaries in conflict-affected areas, 100 are now closed. Hospitals have had to close or evacuate due to structural damage or their proximity to areas of intense bombardment. As of today, 5 hospitals have been evacuated and another 5 partially evacuated, with critical cancer and dialysis patients referred to other hospitals also overwhelmed by increasing health needs. Dialysis centres are having to operate an extra three shifts to accommodate the referred patients while being under-resourced for essential blood testing supplies and personnel.

“The situation in Lebanon is alarming. Attacks on health care debilitate health systems and impede their ability to continue to perform. They also prevent entire communities from accessing health services when they

need them the most," said Dr Hanan Balkhy, WHO Regional Director for the Eastern Mediterranean. "WHO is working tirelessly with the Ministry of Public Health in Lebanon to address critical gaps and support the continuity of essential health services, but what people of Lebanon need most is an immediate ceasefire."

In response to growing needs, WHO is supporting with delivery of essential supplies. On 4 and 5 October, four flights containing medical supplies for trauma care, cholera prevention and mental health treatment arrived from WHO's logistics hub in Dubai to Beirut. The supplies, currently being distributed to priority hospitals in coordination with the Ministry of Public Health, are enough to treat around 100 000 patients. WHO is working to bring in additional supplies.

WHO continues to coordinate with the Lebanese Red Cross and hospitals to equip blood banks with adequate supplies, including testing supplies to support safe blood donation. Surgical trauma capacities, including life-limb saving skills are also being strengthened through war trauma surgery trainings for surgeons of various disciplines. WHO is also working with Ministry of Public Health of Lebanon to establish trauma centers within the existing referral hospitals and to plan for the deployment of Emergency Medical Teams.

WHO support is ongoing to the ministry's Epidemiological Surveillance Unit to expand community-based surveillance on priority diseases in shelters hosting displaced people, especially for acute watery diarrhoea, respiratory infections, and other communicable diseases. WHO is also working to ensure that shelters are linked with primary health centres to support continuation of health services and dispensing essential medications.

WHO calls for attacks on health care to stop. Health care should be protected at all times. Peace is the only solution.

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