



## WHO, St. Jude Children’s Research Hospital and key countries coordinate vital humanitarian action amidst ongoing conflict

10 November 2023, ☐ Some 12 children with cancer or other blood disorders have been evacuated, with their companions, from the Gaza Strip in the occupied Palestinian territory to Egypt and Jordan so they may continue their treatment safely. Additional children are expected to be evacuated for cancer treatment as part of this initiative.

To facilitate the move, the World Health Organization (WHO) and St. Jude Children’s Research Hospital have coordinated with officials from Egypt, Israel, Jordan, the occupied Palestinian territory, and the United States of America, as well as members of the St. Jude Global Alliance, a worldwide community of institutions and foundations dedicated to helping children with cancer and other catastrophic diseases.

WHO welcomes the evacuations of children needing treatment for cancer and emphasizes that sustained, orderly, unimpeded and safe medical evacuations of critically injured and sick patients into and via Egypt through the Rafah Border Crossing are essential. In line with this, WHO and St. Jude are committed to facilitating the evacuation of more pediatric cancer patients, and their family members, as the health status of the patients and security conditions allow.

“I am relieved that children in vital need of cancer care have been able to leave the insecurity and uncertainty in Gaza and continue receiving life-saving treatment in Egypt and Jordan,” said Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, the WHO Director-General. “I also note the efforts, coordinated by St Jude and WHO, of all relevant authorities to put the health needs of these children first. This show of desperately needed humanitarian action should serve to motivate increased access to life-saving care to all people affected by this conflict, both inside Gaza where needs are greatest today, and beyond. I pray this initiative can inspire all parties to put health and peace first.”

The current conflict has obstructed exit for patients from the Gaza Strip, while severely restricting the entry of essential medical supplies, including chemotherapy. The two specialized hospitals offering care to cancer patients, including children, have been overwhelmed, undersupplied, exposed to attacks and, due to the insecurity, one has been forced to close. Cancer care services are therefore severely limited, meaning it is critically urgent to transfer patients outside Gaza for treatment.

James R. Downing, M.D., St. Jude President and CEO said: “Working together, WHO and St. Jude have built relationships with the global community of physicians treating children with cancer. These relationships made it possible to evacuate children from Ukraine early during that war. St. Jude has also supported pediatric cancer patients in the Eastern Mediterranean Region for more than two decades. As a result, St. Jude, working with WHO, is well positioned to facilitate the evacuation of pediatric cancer patients from Gaza.”

In 2022, 122 children in the Gaza Strip were diagnosed with cancer, mainly leukemia. But these children receive only a portion of their cancer care within Gaza due to lack of some cancer services, and, therefore, require referrals to hospitals in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, Egypt, Israel and Jordan for further treatment.

Both WHO and St. Jude have a longstanding history of working in the Eastern Mediterranean Region, with more than 80 institutions in all 22 countries and territories in the Region part of the St. Jude Global Alliance. Five years ago, WHO, St. Jude and other global partners launched the Global Initiative for Childhood Cancer (GICC) to improve survival rate of childhood cancer to at least 60 percent by 2030 and to reduce the suffering of all children with cancer. The GICC brings together more than 100 international stakeholders working to increase capacity to deliver quality services for children with cancer and increasing the prioritization of childhood cancer at global, regional and national levels.

Note to editors

Before the escalation, about 100 patients per day were referred for treatment outside of Gaza. About 1 in 4 were children, and 1 in 3 required cancer care.□

10 November 2023: The press release has been updated to correct that only one of the two hospitals in Gaza providing specialized cancer care has closed, while the second remains partially operational.

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