

From: GUNNESS, Christopher
Sent: 08 August 2015 18:39
To: GUNNESS, Christopher
Subject: FW: PR Infant Mortality Rate Rises in Gaza for First Time in Fifty Years

Dear Colleague,

If you need the report itself or you would like to interview Dr Seita, the Director of UNRWA's Health Department, please be in touch. Thanks.
Chris



christopher gunness | spokesperson, director of advocacy and strategic communications
unrwa | office of the commissioner general | jerusalem
t: +972 2 589 0267 | m: +972 54 240 2659 | f: +972 2 589 0240
e: c.gunness@unrwa.org | skype: chrisrobertgunness | Twitter: @ChrisGunness

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Infant Mortality Rate Rises in Gaza for First Time in Fifty Years

Press Release for Immediate Publication
United Nations Relief and Works Agency, UNRWA

Jerusalem, 8 August 2015: The infant mortality rate in Gaza has risen for the first time in five decades, according to an UNRWA study, and

UNRWA's Health Director says the blockade may be contributing to the trend.

Every five years UNRWA conducts a survey of infant mortality across the region, and the 2013 results were released this week.

The number of babies dying before the age of one has consistently gone down over the last decades in Gaza, from 127 per 1,000 live births in 1960 to 20.2 in 2008. At the last count, in 2013, it had risen to 22.4 per 1,000 live births.

The rate of neonatal mortality, which is the number of babies that die before four weeks old, has also gone up significantly in Gaza, from 12 per 1,000 live births in 2008 to 20.3 in 2013.

"Infant mortality is one of the best indicators for the health of the community," said Dr. Akihiro Seita, Director of UNRWA's health program. "It reflects on the mother and child's health and in the U.N. Millennium Development Goals it is one of the key indicators."

"The rate", Dr. Seita said, "had declined quite smoothly over the last decades across the region, including Gaza. So when the 2013 results from Gaza were first uncovered, UNRWA was alarmed by the apparent increase. So we worked with external independent research groups to examine the data, to ensure the increase could be confirmed. That is why it took us so long to release these latest figures".

Such an increase here is unprecedented in Dr. Seita's experience working in the Middle East. "Progress in combatting infant mortality doesn't usually reverse. This seems to be the first time we have seen an increase like this," Dr. Seita said. "The only other examples I can think of are in some African countries which experienced HIV epidemics".

The UN Agency will carry out another region-wide survey of Palestinian refugees in 2018. However, UNRWA will conduct one this year in Gaza alone because of these latest figures.

"It is hard to know the exact causes behind the increase in both neonatal and infant mortality rates, but I fear it is part of a wider trend. We are very concerned about the impact of the long-term blockade on health facilities, supplies of medicines and bringing

equipment in to Gaza,” Dr. Seita said.

The UNRWA report also highlights that the most recent survey was conducted before last year’s conflict in which over two thousand Palestinians were killed, the majority of whom were civilians, including over 550 children.

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For Interview Requests with Dr Seita, Director of UNRWA’s Health Department or further Information

Contact Chris Gunness: c.gunness@unrwa.org