



COVID-19 in the Occupied Palestinian Territories

The COVID-19 pandemic has underscored the human rights insecurity Palestinians are living under in the Gaza Strip and West Bank, especially in East Jerusalem. Israeli authorities are failing to abide by their duties under international human rights law and the laws applicable to occupying powers.

While the spread of COVID-19 in the occupied Palestinian territories remains relatively limited – 570 confirmed cases and 4 deaths as of May 20 – the severe restrictions on Palestinian movement in the West Bank, the ongoing siege of the Gaza Strip, and the fragility of the Palestinian health system across the territories have left Palestinians at risk of a catastrophic spread of the virus, adding to the deprivations Palestinians experience daily.

According to the Palestinian Authority Ministry of Health, 75% of COVID-19 cases in the **West Bank** involve Palestinians who work in Israel and in Israeli settlements as day laborers. The Palestinian Authority (PA) has imposed daily curfews in areas A and B under its control (40% of the West Bank) and restricted Palestinian movement to and from the settlements and Israel. However, because of extreme poverty and Palestinian dependence on the Israeli economy, Palestinians have continued to travel for work in the settlements and in Israel. No testing has been made available to the 300,000 Palestinians living in Area C (60% of the West Bank), which is under the control of Israeli authorities, who continue to demolish Palestinian homes and livelihood structures, according to UNOCHA. Also, there has been a reported spike in settler violence – including assault, arson, and vandalism – against Palestinians since the start of the pandemic.

Neglect of Palestinians is particularly stark in **East Jerusalem**, annexed by Israel in 1967 and currently home to some 370,000 Palestinians. Early in the pandemic, Israeli authorities shut down attempts by the PA to provide care to Palestinians but failed to impose the precautions it had enacted in West Jerusalem and Israel, including the provision of comprehensive testing, closing of businesses, and strict stay-at-home orders. On April 14, Israeli authorities closed down an improvised clinic in the East Jerusalem neighborhood of Silwan and arrested those involved because they relied on PA testing capacities.

In response to a petition to the Israeli Supreme Court, Israeli authorities set up an inadequate number of testing sites in East Jerusalem that were available only to Palestinians with certain health insurance, leaving a dangerous vacuum of care, particularly for those east of the wall but outside of PA-controlled areas, where some 150,000 Palestinian reside.

In the **Gaza Strip**, the health sector is on the verge of collapse because of the Israeli-imposed 14-year blockade, which has devastated infrastructure and left a severe shortage of qualified personnel and essential medications, medical equipment, and protective devices. Hamas authorities in Gaza severely restricted movement from Egypt and Israel and imposed a strict quarantine on any returning Palestinians. However, in a territory of 375 square kilometers with two million people, only 7,861 tests have been administered because of shortages.

Reports of neglect and contagion amongst Palestinians held in Israeli detention facilities and prisons have been refuted by Israel. A series of control measures were reportedly introduced to stymie outbreaks. However, hearings in court, and family and lawyer visits have been halted.