

June 2026

Rats, Insects and the Rise of Pest-Linked Diseases in Gaza



MedGlobal

medglobal.org



“One of my greatest concerns is the increasing spread of rats, mosquitos and other disease vectors in Gaza. The ongoing conflict has damaged essential services and created living conditions that make disease prevention extremely difficult. Without immediate investment in public health, vector control, and environmental health services, preventable diseases will continue to threaten the health and dignity of vulnerable communities.”

- Dr. Salwa Al-Tibi, MedGlobal’s Country Director in Gaza

Introduction

Across the sprawling tent camps that most Gazans call home after more than two-and-a-half years of bombings and repeated displacement, a rapidly escalating public health crisis is unfolding. The breakdown of sanitation, waste management, and healthcare has shifted pests from a nuisance to a worsening, dangerous health threat.

Sustained intense conflict, the targeting of civilian infrastructure, the severe reduction of available land and living space, and restrictions on humanitarian aid have created the conditions for pest infestations. With over 90% of the population displaced, most families across Gaza are living in tents and makeshift shelters amid rubble, uncollected waste, and weak sanitation systems.

This poor environment creates conditions where rodents and insects are able to multiply unchecked. Pools of stagnant water, overflowing sewage, and mounting piles of uncollected waste create ideal conditions for pests. Infestations of rats, rodents, mosquitoes, sandflies, cockroaches, fleas, lice, and other disease vectors are now widespread across the camps.

In recent humanitarian assessments in Gaza, virtually all displacement camps (97%) had health risks from the environment. This includes of displacement sites exposed to the frequent presence of rodents or other pests, impacting [over 1.4 million](#) people – more than two-thirds of Gaza’s population. MedGlobal clinical data corroborates United Nations U.N. and other data showing a sharp rise in diseases commonly linked to pests including skin infections such as scabies and gastro-intestinal illnesses. The mental health impact of rats and other pests infesting peoples’ living spaces is also extensive.

Rats are entering living spaces, biting people, and contaminating food. Hospitals are seeing daily cases of rat bites along with thousands of skin infections linked to various pests. Children and pregnant women are among the most affected, with over two thirds at heightened risk of infection due to overcrowding, poor hygiene, and constant exposure.

As the pest crisis expands, mitigation options are limited. Severe shortages of insecticides, diagnostic tools, medicines, and functioning water and sewage systems mean outbreaks are harder to prevent, detect, and treat. What is emerging is not an isolated outbreak from a single vector, but multiple disease threats stemming from the rapid spread of numerous types of pests.

Cumulatively, the spread of pests is creating a public health emergency.

A Perfect Storm of System Collapse



“What is different for us this time? In the past, there were houses where people could lock their doors. Now, living in camps, any rodent outside can enter any tent...”

- Dr. Sabri Al-Qedrah, a doctor at a MedGlobal health point in Gaza

Poor Conditions in Displacement Sites

Two years of conflict and destruction of entire neighborhoods has forced most of Gaza’s population into overcrowded shelters and tent camps. Israeli forces occupy around 60% of Gaza’s pre-October 2023 land, forcing a population of over two million people to crowd into even more limited space. Most people now live in displacement camps, where garbage attracts pests and rubble and crowded tents provide ideal hiding and nesting places for rodents and insects. Extreme overcrowding makes the spread of diseases even more difficult to control, as medical isolation becomes almost impossible.

Fuel and Electricity Shortages

Fuel shortages and power outages have crippled essential services across Gaza and impacted the entire humanitarian response. Hospitals face frequent blackouts, while water pumps, desalination facilities, wastewater treatment plants, and sewage systems often stop functioning. Fuel is also required for water trucking and waste collection. As essential services deteriorate and environmental conditions worsen, pest populations are able to expand unchecked.

Water and Sewage System Failures

Damage to water and sanitation infrastructure from the conflict has resulted in stagnant wastewater, sewage overflows, and contaminated water supplies. Continued conflict since the ceasefire deal of October 2025 has led to [additional damage](#) to water and sanitation infrastructure. The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) found that water production in Gaza is 40% of what it was before the conflict escalation in October 2023. Recent indicators suggest access to water is significantly worsening in 2026, with reports from the U.N. of a [20% drop in water production](#) in May compared to just two months earlier. The water and sanitation cluster within the U.N.-led humanitarian response [warned](#) by May 2026 that the pipe network had reached “a point of collapse.”

By April 2026, the Site Management Cluster in Gaza [reported](#) that 61% of displacement sites had sewage in surrounding streets, 56% had accumulated solid waste, and 24% had flooding or stagnant water. Solid waste management continues to rely on temporary dump sites located near active displacement sites, with the U.N. [reporting](#), “more sustainable responses require restored access to Gaza’s sanitary landfills near the perimeter, where Israeli forces remain deployed...”

The accumulation of uncollected waste attracts rodents, flies, and other pests, increasing the risk of disease transmission and environmental contamination. Standing water creates breeding sites for mosquitoes and flies, while limited access to clean water undermines hygiene and increases the risk of infectious disease transmission. Limited access to clean water also makes prevention and treatment of diseases and infections difficult.



Destruction of the Healthcare System

The collapse of health services limits both the prevention and treatment of diseases from pest infestations. Gaza’s health system is left crippled after the repeated bombing of health facilities; the killing, detention, and displacement of health workers; and persistent restrictions on medical supplies. There is not a single fully functional hospital in Gaza, with half of its 37 hospitals [completely non-operational](#) and the rest only partially functional. Similarly, [less than 60%](#) of primary healthcare centers are functional, and most of those are only partially functional.

Severe shortages of medicines, antibiotics, laboratory supplies, and diagnostic equipment limit both treatment and disease surveillance. Limited laboratory testing make it difficult to track the true scale of disease transmission. Meanwhile, delays in treatment allow infectious diseases to spread more widely, particularly in overcrowded displacement sites.

Restrictions on Humanitarian Aid

The U.N.-led humanitarian response launched a pest control plan in May 2026, beginning treatment across over 1,000 camps. But efforts to control pest infestations are hindered by persistent and significant restrictions on the entry of humanitarian supplies into Gaza. Repeated closures of crossing points have severely hindered humanitarian access. Currently, Kerem Shalom is the only crossing for approved cargo, with the closure of Zikim crossing in northern Gaza on May 24, 2026. The U.N. also [reported](#) that a newly required route for humanitarian convoys to access Kerem Shalom is leading to additional delays and operational challenges.

U.N. OCHA [warned](#), “While interventions that rely on pesticides are well underway, implementation requires lengthy processes including procurement, approvals, shipment, deployment and safe application.” While some materials were brought in in May, U.N. OCHA [warned](#) by mid-June, “Humanitarian partners are using up the pesticides and rodenticides they brought into Gaza in May.” While approved materials face delays, other critical items are blocked entirely from entering Gaza. For instance, the U.N. [reports](#) that health facilities require phones and tablets for disease surveillance and reporting, but that those items have not been allowed into Gaza. Humanitarian actors also report a consistent need for machines and other equipment to remove waste and rubble, while [shortages](#) of items like pipes and fittings prevent the repair of critical water and sanitation infrastructure. These constraints weaken public health interventions and limit the ability of humanitarian organizations to respond effectively.



“We especially suffer from rats and weasels that run around... They run around us and eat our things, eat our bread, and our grains. They eat everything. I am really afraid – afraid for the kids if they come at night... They might come and bite us sleeping, bite our children... We really, really suffer from this. No matter how many traps we set up, we can’t handle them.”

- A displaced woman living in al-Zuhour camp

Public Health Impacts



“The current environment attracts rodents and rats. The rubble is a place they can hide in all day. At night, they spread among the tents. This has a highly negative impact on health, especially for kids... A bite itself can cause severe infections... especially with poor healthcare, lack of bandages, and unavailable medicines and antibiotics.”

- Dr. Sabri Al-Qedrah, a doctor at a MedGlobal health point in Gaza

The spread of pests across displacement shelters is driving a sharp rise in preventable illness. What were once isolated conditions are now widespread across camps. Virtually all displacement camps ([97%](#)) had visible environmental health hazards in an April assessment. Specifically, [over 80%](#) of displacement sites had a frequent presence of rodents or other pests, impacting [over 1.4 million](#) people. MedGlobal teams report worsening infestations of rats, rodents, mosquitoes, sandflies, cockroaches, fleas, lice, and other disease vectors.

The health cluster within the U.N.-led humanitarian response finished an assessment on May 25, 2026, concluding that Gaza’s risk of rodent-associated morbidity and mortality is now “high.”



OVER

80%

**of displacement
sites had a frequent
presence of rodents
or other pests**

MedGlobal-supported health facilities already report a rise in communicable diseases that are consistent with the deteriorating environmental and public health conditions across Gaza. Between January and May 2026, MedGlobal facilities recorded over 10,000 consultations for conditions commonly spread by rodents or insects, including dermatological diseases, scabies, impetigo, gastrointestinal illnesses, and hepatitis, indicating a correlation between worsening exposure to pests and a growing public health crisis.

Skin conditions are the most commonly reported health concern. [Eighty-one percent of sites](#) reported the presence of skin infections or rashes in an April assessment, while around two-thirds reported lice and half reported bedbugs. During the first five months of 2026 alone, UNRWA reported [over 125,000 cases of skin infections](#) linked to rats and parasites, while MedGlobal's clinical data shows a similar sharp rise.

Scabies demonstrated the most alarming increase in MedGlobal-supported health sites, rising from 10 cases in January to 89 cases in May – an almost nine-fold increase within five months. The sharpest acceleration in reporting from MedGlobal sites occurred between March and May, suggesting worsening community transmission.

OVER

125,000

cases of skin infections linked to rats and parasites



Rodent exposure is also contributing to more serious infectious disease risks. Rats are entering shelters, contaminating food, and causing direct injuries. Reported cases include leptospirosis, hantavirus infection, and rat-bite fever, all of which can lead to severe complications if untreated. The health cluster also assessed Gaza's population is at high risk of Salmonellosis (bacterial infection caused by *Salmonella*) and Murine typhus, as well as moderate risk of Leptospirosis and lymphocytic choriomeningitis virus (LCMV).

Mosquitoes and flies are also increasingly contributing to the health burden, as stagnant water and uncollected waste provide ideal breeding conditions. "Over time, the stagnant water and garbage piles have caused a boom in mosquito and sandfly populations leading to an imminent risk of disease outbreaks such as leishmaniasis, malaria, and dengue fever," said Salwa Al-Tibi, MedGlobal's Country Director in Gaza. These conditions are most severe in densely populated displacement sites where sanitation is weakest.

Gaza's population is already highly vulnerable after being forced into poor living conditions in overcrowded camps at a time when many are still facing weakened immunity from malnutrition, famine conditions last year, and limited access to aid. We are already witnessing the impact of this emerging and largely unaddressed public health crisis, particularly on children, pregnant women, older adults, and other vulnerable populations.



Conclusion

The spread of pests across Gaza is not an unavoidable environmental problem. It is a symptom of a wider collapse of critical systems that protect public health. Two years of conflict have devastated housing, healthcare, water and sanitation infrastructure, waste management, and the humanitarian response capacity needed to prevent pest infestations and disease outbreaks in the first place. As a result, the majority of Gazans are now living in conditions where exposure to rodents and insects is part of daily life.

This crisis was not inevitable and it can be brought under control. An increase in the availability of fuel, water, housing materials, pesticides and other sanitation supplies is vital to curbing the spread of pest-linked diseases. At the same time, the health system that should function to treat such diseases is debilitated and needs major investments in infrastructure, the supply of medicines and medical equipment, and staffing. Without urgent action, the conditions driving pest infestations and correlated diseases will continue to worsen, placing more people at risk of preventable illness.



MEDGLOBAL'S RESPONSE IN GAZA



MedGlobal operates 16 medical points and health centers across all five governorates of Gaza, providing primary care, mental health, emergency services, and other health services. The organization also fully supports a maternity and reproductive health hospital in the Middle Area, treating more than 1,400 patients every day. MedGlobal also provides nutrition services, with two nutrition stabilization centers and mobile teams that performed over 163,000 malnutrition screenings in 2025, treated malnutrition cases, distributed supplements, and offered essential medications, therapeutic food, and follow-up care.

In 2025, MedGlobal supported 67 health facilities, supporting over 500,000 direct beneficiaries and more than 600,000 indirect beneficiaries. This work is possible thanks to MedGlobal's team that includes 400+ local Palestinian doctors, nurses, and staff, supported by international medical missions.



CONTACT US

Phone: 708.400.9542

Email:

info@medglobal.org

Address:

MedGlobal
1801 Hicks Road Suite D
Rolling Meadows, IL 60008
medglobal.org

