COVID-19 cases are surging in the densely packed **Gaza Strip**, which has been shut off from the world by an Israeli blockade for 14 years. At the beginning of March 2021, some 56,000 cases had been identified, but testing equipment is scarce and the Health Ministry estimates that 40% of its population—70% of whom are refugees—may be infected by the virus. Basic sanitary precautions are all but ruled out by the lack of access to clean water.

• 98% of the Gaza Strip’s 2 million residents, 992,000 of them children, are without clean drinking water due to the overuse and near collapse of Gaza’s sole aquifer into which sea water is leaching, as well as Israel’s continuing destruction of Palestinian wells and the water infrastructure.

• 97% of the water in the Gaza Strip is undrinkable, and at least 100,000 people are completely disconnected from the water network. The purchase of potable tanked or bottled water is beyond the means of large numbers of Gazans.

• In a 2012 report, the UN predicted that the Gaza Strip would be “unlivable” by 2020, and that its sole aquifer will suffer “irreversible damage” unless urgent steps are taken to address the water crisis. Two years later, Israel’s 51-day bombardment of the Gaza Strip targeted water, sewage, and electricity installations, and destroyed or damaged more than 50% of the water infrastructure, including 778 underground wells.

• Following its destruction of large parts of the Gaza Strip in 2008–09 and again in 2014, Israel has permitted the entry of only 30% of materials needed for the reconstruction of water and wastewater projects. Pipes and cement have been barred as “dual-use items,” which could be used for military purposes.

• In 2017 and 2019 two desalination plants were opened in the Gaza Strip. Together they could provide 16,000 cubic meters of water per day if the energy to run them were available. The residents of the Gaza Strip need at least 150,000 cubic meters per day.

 • Water and sanitation projects that have been completed have been unable to function because of the severe fuel and electricity shortage. For months at a time the Gaza Strip has had only 4 to 6 hours of electricity a day, and fuel has been kept out by the blockade.

• Because of electricity and fuel shortage, generators and pumps don’t work on a regular basis, causing large sewage lakes to form. A few years ago, one lake overflowed, drowning 5 people in a nearby village.

• Because of the breakdown in the sanitation infrastructure, the equivalent of 43 Olympic-size swimming pools of untreated wastewater is dumped into the sea every day.

• The World Health Organization estimates that water contamination is responsible for

26% of all disease in the Gaza Strip. Half of the children suffer from water-related parasitic infections, and many babies suffer from “blue baby syndrome” due to the excessive nitrates in the water.