

SITUATION UPDATES

A 6.3 magnitude earthquake hit the western region in Afghanistan on 7 October 2023, affecting Herat Province, followed by a series of aftershocks until the morning of 8 October 2023. The epicenter was located 30km northeast of **Zindajan district, Herat Province**. At least 11,585 people (1,655 families) have been affected across Zindajan, Injil, Gulran, Kohsan, and Kushk districts. The Kushk, Naieb Rafi, and Sia Arab villages in Zindajan district have been heavily damaged.

By the time of reporting (as of 8 October, 19:00 pm), WHO reported 552 severe and critical cases referred to and admitted to seven hospitals in Herat City, in addition to 260 dead bodies. OCHA Afghanistan reported a total of **1,023 deaths** and **1,663 injuries** across 11 villages in Zindajan district, where 100 percent of homes were totally destroyed. The Ministry of Public Health reported more than 2500 deaths from the affected areas. While search and rescue operations remain ongoing, casualties in these areas have not yet been fully identified. An additional 516 people (203 men and 213 women) remain to be missing in Zindajan district.

Most of those injured are being treated in the Herat Regional Hospital located in Herat City, which serves as the main referral point for earthquake victims. Since the onset of the earthquake, a total of 552 people received treatment (81 men, 199 women, 229 children under five years of age, and 43 unknown), including those from Herat City and those transferred from the affected villages by aerial support. Almost 100 severe cases were referred to five private hospitals for further treatment. In addition, 260 deaths were received at the hospital.

An estimated 300 families (2,100 people) are reported to have been displaced. They temporarily stayed in shelters, with limited water and in congested space. The potential increase of infectious diseases in the aftermath of the earthquake is of concern considering the vulnerability of the affected people.

In coordination with the health authorities, the World Health Organization (WHO) and 19 Health Partners rapidly mobilized resources and extended immediate life-saving support for the affected population. Health Cluster has coordinated the response to leverage the efforts of the partners and the stakeholders.



Photo 1: Most of homes were completely destroyed. The search and rescue operation continues in Zindajan district, Herat Province.

EMERGENCY RESPONSE

WHO activated its Incident Management System (IMS). IMS is an internal WHO system used in emergencies to ensure timely, effective, and efficient response to emergencies to minimize avoidable deaths and casualties.

Health Cluster Coordination

- Two ad hoc Health Cluster partners' meetings were conducted in Herat on the evening of 7 October and on the morning of 8 October. A total of 20 Health Cluster partners and the Provincial Public Health Directorate representatives in Herat attended the meeting. Four committees were established to support the health response: 1) Emergency Health Services Committee, 2) Healthcare Workers Mobilizing Committee, 3) Medical Supplies Committee, and 4) Referral Coordination Committee.
- The Regional Health Cluster Coordination Team for the western region coordinates the health response in the field. The Health Cluster has relocated its Regional Health Cluster Coordinator for the southeast region to Herat to support the team.

Trauma and Hospital Care

- A total of 54 mobile health teams (MHTs) have been deployed by Health Cluster partners (World Vision, WHO/OCCD, CARE, ICRC, OHPM, IOM, AADA, IRC, IOM, UNFPA and IRWs) to 12 affected villages. This includes four MHTs run by IRC in Zindajan District, three MHTs by UNFPA in Jibhrail District, Zindajan District, and Shindani District, and three MHTs by WHO/OCCD in Zindajan District. These teams aim to provide health services, evacuate casualties to referral facilities, and assess health needs in the affected areas.
- In addition, 12 ambulances were sent to Zindajan District and Ghorian District to evacuate casualties to the regional and other hospitals.
- UNFPA has deployed staff from four basic health centers (BHCs) to support the Herat Regional Hospital.
- WHO has deployed five technical officers to Herat to enhance the response and coordination activities. WHO Afghanistan Health Emergencies Programme Team Lead visited Herat Regional Hospital to assess the situation and identify acute health needs to save more lives.
- IOM has provided primary health care services (PHC) in Injil District through two PHC facilities.



Photo 2: Dr Alaa Abouzeid, WHO Team Lead for Emergencies arrives in Herat to assist WHO Team on the ground and identify additional support to save lives and scale up WHO response



Photo 3: WHO Teams on the ground to provide medical support to those injured and in transporting patients to health facilities

Disease Surveillance/Potential Diseases Outbreak Prevention & Response

- Considering the fragile condition among the affected population, WHO has prepared for potential communicable disease outbreaks such as measles, acute respiratory infections (ARI), tetanus, and acute watery diarrhea. WHO has coordinated with the National Disease Surveillance Response (NDSR) team to enhance surveillance activities. This includes active surveillance to be conducted by a WHO-supported surveillance support team (SST) in Zindajan District starting on 8 October. Additional SST will be deployed based on the initial assessment.

Operational support and logistics

- MSF, and the Herat Medicines Markets Association have provided medical supplies to support the response.
- WHO has provided 55 kits of different models, including trauma and emergency surgery kits (TESK), interagency emergency health kits (IEHK) and dressing materials sufficient to treat 550 injured patients to the Herat Regional Hospital. To prepare for further increase of causality in the affected population, WHO has prepared for immediate dispatch from the WHO Herat warehouse, including TESK, cholera kits, measles kits, and Interagency Emergency Health Kit (IEHK).
- UNFPA prepositioned various kits, including 4,190 dignity kits, 4,025 blankets, 27,617 tarpaulin sheets, 1,400 Mama & Baby Kits, and 2,000 Individual Clean Delivery Kits.

GAPS

- A significant number of people were displaced from the affected areas to Herat City. The patients who were discharged from the hospitals and their families continued to stay in temporary shelters, such as tents, where poor hygiene was observed, contributing to potential acute respiratory infections. Preparedness for any potential ancillary health threats, such as disease outbreaks (measles and ARI), must be in place.
- Health Cluster and partners are still assessing the damage to health infrastructure. Damage to the operating theatre in Sakina Yakobi Maternity Hospital in Herat was reported.
- While search and rescue operations remain ongoing, the exact numbers of casualties and houses/premises destroyed are still not fully confirmed. The geographic challenges in remote areas have hindered the operations. Continued rapid assessments are needed to identify both casualties and capacity in coordination with the authorities and stakeholders for response actions.
- There is a great need for Psychological First Aid for the survivors and some friendly spaces for the children who have experienced significant stress and loss of loved ones.

Zahra, a 17-year-old female living in the remote Zindajan District of Herat Province with a family of eight, survived after being trapped under rubble for more than a day following the earthquake on 7 October. She was finally found when debris was removed by a bulldozer 26 hours after the earthquake, at around 1 p.m. on 8 October.

On the morning when the 6.2 magnitude earthquake hit her village, Zahra was in the sheep barn feeding her livestock. At the first tremor, the mud structure collapsed entirely, and she found herself stuck under heavy debris. She tenaciously remained conscious as she waited to be rescued, shouting as much as her strength would allow until she was finally freed. After her rescue, Zahra was immediately transferred to Herat Regional Hospital, where she received treatment for leg fractures from dedicated healthcare professionals. Tragically, she lost four family members, including two children, due to the earthquake, along with her house and all of her belongings. Her husband, who resides in Iran, was notified of this tragedy and is returning to Afghanistan to be by her side.

Zahra's story is but one among many in this resilient community. Countless others like her are grappling with the trauma of loss and the daunting task of rebuilding their lives from the ground up. Families are desperately searching for missing loved ones, their hopes pinned on finding them safe and sound within the hospital's walls.



For more information on the response to #HeratEarthquake, contact:

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For more information, please visit:

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