

Millions of Yemen's children face starvation as coronavirus outbreak worsens, UNICEF warns

UNICEF says the number of malnourished children could increase to 2.4 million

Issa Nasser, a 7-month-old Yemeni child, was suffering from severe malnutrition last week.

"I don't have anything to give him," his father, a local fisherman, told The Associated Press.

This week, Nasser is dead - one of thousands of children expected to die of starvation this year in Yemen.



Seven-month-old Issa Ibrahim Nasser brought to a clinic in Deir Al-Hassi, Yemen, in June. (AP Photo/Issa Al-Rajhi)

The war-torn country is on the brink of a massive famine as donations dry up amid the COVID-19 pandemic. The spread of disease, coupled with an ongoing five-year civil war between Houthi rebels and Saudi-backed pro-government forces, is creating the perfect storm for a massive humanitarian crisis, according to

UNICEF Yemen's chief of communication Bismarck Swangin.

"Whilst the criteria to declare a famine have not been met, there is widespread and serious malnutrition, and children are continuing to die on a daily basis," Swangin told Fox News. "The arrival of COVID-19 has made a difficult situation even worse."

UNICEF has reported the number of malnourished children could increase to 2.4 million without further international intervention.

Swangin added that social-distancing measures, along with fear of getting sick, created new challenges for hunger response services aimed at reaching mothers and their children.



Issa Ibrahim Nasser weighed less than 10 pounds last month. (AP Photo/Issa Al-Rajhi)

With 80 percent of Yemen's population relying on some form of international aid for survival, global attention to the situation has been critical for gathering monetary and humanitarian support.



In June, the United Nations and Saudi Arabia held a donation drive for Yemen, raising \$1.35 billion in aid money. The number was half of what U.N. member

states pledged last year and includes only a fraction of the money Yemen needs to battle the spread of COVID-19.

AS U.S. CORONAVIRUS CASES GROW, DOCTORS AND NURSES FEAR PPE SHORTAGE

While Yemen has been reporting only around 1,300 cases of coronavirus, the true extent of the outbreak likely has been much worse, analysts warned. Limited testing capabilities and access to medical facilities made it difficult to gauge the gravity of the situation.

Nongovernmental organizations [NGOs] have been operating around the clock in Yemen, tasked with balancing nutrition needs of the population while avoiding the inevitable spread of COVID-19.



Hundreds of children have suffered from acute severe malnutrition because of poverty and grinding conflict in Yemen. (AP Photo/Issa Al-Rajhi)

“Yemen will be slammed by the virus as it takes root because of the weakened immune systems, malnourishment, and a prolonged state of poor health,” said Steve Gumaer, the president of Partners Relief & Development, an international grassroots charity set to distribute food this week in the country.

While many larger NGOs and the United Nations have seen a decrease in

donations, Gumaer was experiencing the opposite. He attributed the rise in funds to people feeling more connected to world issues, such as the humanitarian crisis Yemen has faced.

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Gumaer said he'd speak with his partners in Yemen daily and reiterated the need for international attention to the extremely vulnerable civilian population.

"Yemen can't handle this crisis alone," Gumaer added.

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