

MIDDLE EAST

TENSIONS RISE AMID MINISTER’S JERUSALEM VISIT



MAJDI MOHAMMED, ASSOCIATED PRESS

People participate in a demonstration in support of Palestinians in the Gaza Strip amid the ongoing Israel-Hamas war, Sunday in Nablus, West Bank.

Officials say 33 aid-seekers killed by Israeli gunfire in Gaza

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DEIR AL-BALAH, Gaza Strip — A far-right Israeli minister visited and prayed at Jerusalem’s most sensitive holy site on Sunday, triggering regional condemnation and fears that the provocative move could further escalate tensions. The visit came as hospitals in Gaza said 33 more Palestinians seeking food aid were killed by Israeli gunfire.

With Israel facing global criticism over famine-like conditions in the besieged strip, Itamar Ben-Gvir’s visit to the hill-side compound threatened to further set back efforts by international mediators to halt Israel’s nearly two-year military offensive in Gaza.

The area, which Jews call the Temple Mount, is the holiest site in Judaism and was home to the ancient biblical temples. Muslims call the site the Noble Sanctuary. Today it is home to the Al-Aqsa Mosque, the third-holiest site in Islam.

Visits to the site by Israeli officials are considered a provocation across the Muslim world and openly praying violates a longstanding status quo. Jews have been

allowed to tour it but are barred from praying, with Israeli police and troops providing security. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu’s office said after Ben-Gvir’s visit that Israel would not change the norms governing the site.

Ben-Gvir visited following Hamas’ release of videos showing two emaciated Israeli hostages. The videos caused an uproar in Israel and raised pressure on the government to reach a deal to bring home the remaining 50 hostages who were captured on Oct. 7, 2023, in the Hamas-led attack that triggered the war.

Ben-Gvir called for Israel to annex the Gaza Strip and encourage Palestinians to leave, reviving rhetoric that has complicated negotiations to end the war. He raged against a video that Hamas released Saturday of 24-year-old hostage Evyatar David showing him emaciated in a dimly lit Gaza tunnel, and called it an attempt to pressure Israel.

Ben-Gvir’s previous visits to the site have prompted threats from Palestinian militant groups. Clashes between Israeli security forces and Palestinian demonstrators in and around the site fueled an

11-day war with Hamas in 2021.

Sunday’s visit was swiftly condemned as an incitement by Palestinian leaders as well as Jordan, the Al-Aqsa Mosque’s custodian, Saudi Arabia and Turkey. Houthi rebels in Yemen said they fired three drones at Israel; Israel’s military said a “suspicious aerial target launched from Yemen” was intercepted.

The videos — released by Hamas and Islamic Jihad, the second-largest militant group in Gaza — triggered outrage across the political spectrum after the hostages, speaking under duress, described grim conditions and an urgent lack of food. Tens of thousands rallied in Tel Aviv on Saturday, calling on Israel and the United States to urgently pursue the hostages’ release after suspending ceasefire talks.

Israel’s mission to the U.N. said it requested an emergency meeting of the U.N. Security Council on the hostages, which will take place Tuesday.

“They do not want a deal,” Netanyahu said of Hamas. “They want to break us using these videos of horror.”

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Nine cases of measles confirmed in Oconto County

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The Wisconsin Department of Health Services and Oconto County Public Health have confirmed nine cases of measles in Oconto County, just north of Green Bay.

One case was confirmed through testing at the Wisconsin State Laboratory of Hygiene, with eight other cases confirmed based on exposure and symptoms, DHS officials said in a statement.

All of those infected were exposed to a common source during out-of-state travel, according to the statement.

No additional information will be released due to privacy laws, officials said.

DHS, in coordination with the Oconto County Public Health, is working to identify and notify people who may have been exposed to the measles virus.

No public points of exposure have been identified and the risk to the community remains low, officials said.

The first case of measles in Dane County in more than two decades was confirmed in April 2024 in a county resident who works in Rock County and was infected while traveling domestically outside of Wisconsin, health officials said then.

One case was reported in the state in October 2023 in the state, in Milwaukee County.

Measles is a highly contagious disease that can be spread through the air and can stay in the air for two hours after an infected person coughs or sneezes. It’s so contagious that if one person gets it, up to 90% of the people around them may also become infected if they are not vaccinated,

DHS officials said.

Symptoms of measles include fever, cough, runny nose, pink eye and a telltale rash. They typically don’t develop until at least 10 days after exposure. People with measles remain infectious for about nine days.

Measles is highly contagious and can cause serious health complications for those who aren’t vaccinated, DHS officials said.

Cases of measles have been rare in Wisconsin because of relatively high vaccination rates historically, but only 84.8% of kindergartners in Wisconsin had received two doses of the vaccine in the 2023-2024 school year, third-lowest among states after Idaho and Alaska, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention said last year.

The state’s relatively low rate “definitely makes us vulnerable,” said Dr. Jasmine Zapata, chief medical officer for community health promotion at the state Department of Health Services.

In the previous decade, Wisconsin had few cases. There were two in 2014, and in 2021, there were 22 cases in an outbreak at Fort McCoy among people who had recently traveled from Afghanistan during the U.S. government’s emergency evacuation efforts.

Before last year, Dane County’s last case was in 2000, according to Public Health Madison and Dane County.

The best way to protect against measles is to get the MMR vaccine, DHS officials said. Two doses of the measles vaccine are 97% effective at preventing the disease, officials said.