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***THOUSANDS MORE ALLEGEDLY AFFECTED BY ISIS'S
CHEMICAL WEAPONS ATTACK ON TAZA, IRAQ***

New Firsthand Estimate of Casualties Far Outstrips Earlier Reports

WASHINGTON – The head of an Iraqi humanitarian organization who visited the village of Taza Khurmato the week following a March 8, 2016 [chemical weapons attack](#) by the Islamic State or Iraq and al-Sham (ISIS) claims that over 6,000 inhabitants have been made ill by the mustard and chlorine-containing rockets used in the attack. This far outstrips previous media reports, which estimate 500 to 800 casualties. One of the suspected reasons for the higher number is residual poisoning in the many affected areas that have not been evacuated or decontaminated.

The aid worker, Mustafa al-Obeidi, claims that while the public health center in Taza could confirm the high number of those affected, the Iraqi Ministry of Health has asked the center's medical staff to make no statements to the media. He speculated that the Iraqi government is downplaying the severity of the attack in order to avoid panic.

Taza is located just south of Kirkuk in Northern Iraq and its estimated population of 35,000 are mostly Iraqi Shia Turkmen – one of the many groups targeted by ISIS militants. It is close to the village of al-Bashir, which has been under the control of the Islamic State since June 2014, and Taza has been subjected to repeated attacks ever since (more on these attacks is available on our Iraq Security and Humanitarian Monitor [timeline](#)).

Most of Taza's residents lack the resources necessary to seek treatment anywhere other than the village's small health center, which is poorly equipped to respond to the crisis. Al-Obeidi emphasized his belief that the Iraqi government's response has been inadequate and called for a militarized decontamination plan to evacuate the areas affected, allow experts to conduct necessary tests, and provide immediate treatment to those suffering.

On March 12, Popular Mobilization (PMU) General Abu Radha al-Najar [said](#) that an Iranian medical team specialized in chemical gases arrived in Taza to provide treatment for those injured. On March 13, Taza's District Director Hussein Adil [announced](#) the arrival of American and German medical experts to run tests on areas affected by the mustard gas.

The Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) has [confirmed](#) through laboratory testing that ISIS has indeed used chemical weapons containing mustard gas in Iraq. Mustard gas is a chemical agent absorbed through inhalation, consumption, or direct contact. Symptoms include severe itching and burning of the skin, eyes, and respiratory tract, skin discoloration, painful blisters, shortness of breath and, in many cases, death. Unlike other chemical agents, symptoms of mustard gas exposure do not appear for [12 to 24 hours](#), making it more difficult to detect and treat.

At least one [woman](#) and three children, [Fatima](#) (3 years old), [Masuma](#) (10 years old) and [Ali Mousa](#) (6 months old) have died from mustard gas exposure in Taza.

The Education for Peace in Iraq Center (EPIC) works one-on-one with young people in Iraq to carry out impactful programs, monitor the crisis and inform public policy, enhance understanding of Iraq's story, and advocate on their behalf. EPIC was founded in 1998 by veterans of the Gulf War seeking to make Iraq safe and prosperous again by encouraging a human security approach and empowering youth for peace.

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For more on ISIS's use of chemical weapons in Taza and elsewhere in Iraq, visit our [blog post](#).

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