

Strong earthquake that sparked a tsunami warning leaves 1 dead amid widespread panic in Philippines

December 3 2023, by Jim Gomez



Patients at Manuel J. Santos Hospital in Butuan City, southern Philippines, are evacuated after an earthquake, Saturday evening, Dec. 2, 2023. A powerful earthquake with a preliminary magnitude of 7.6 struck Saturday off the southern Philippine coast, prompting many villagers to flee their homes in panic after Philippine authorities issued a tsunami warning. Credit: AP Photo/Ivy Marie Mangadlao

A powerful earthquake that shook the southern Philippines killed at least one villager and injured several others as thousands scrambled out of their homes in panic and jammed roads to higher grounds after a tsunami warning was issued, officials said Sunday.

The U.S. Geological Survey reported that the quake Saturday night had a magnitude of 7.6 and struck at a depth of 32 kilometers (20 miles). The Pacific Tsunami Warning Center said it expected tsunami waves to hit the southern Philippines and parts of Indonesia, Palau and Malaysia, but later dropped its tsunami warning.

The USGS recorded further earthquakes Sunday with magnitudes of 6.6 and 6.9 but but there were no tsunami alerts.

In Japan, authorities issued evacuation orders late Saturday in various parts of Okinawa prefecture, including for the entire coastal area, affecting thousands of people.

A pregnant woman died after she, her husband and daughter were hit by a 15-foot (4.5-meter) concrete wall that collapsed in their neighborhood as the ground shook and prompted them to flee from their house in Tagum city in Davao del Norte province, the city's disaster-mitigation chief, Sheldon Isidoro, told The Associated Press.

Her husband and daughter were injured. Two other children and their parents jumped from a second-floor window in panic as their house swayed but were not injured after landing on a grassy lot, said Isidoro, who was at his home when the ground started to shake.



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"Initially the swaying was weak. Then it quickly became stronger and I could hardly stand. My perfume bottles fell off a table, pictures on my wall swung and I heard people screaming outside: 'Get out, get out, earthquake, earthquake!'" Isidoro said.

While he feared the roof of his house would collapse on him, Isidoro said he was more worried that there could be many casualties in Tagum,

a city of about 300,000 people, where he had led regular earthquake drills that he thought helped prevent more deaths and injuries.

Hundreds of patients were evacuated from a Tagum hospital but later were escorted back after an inspection showed no major damage to the building, officials said.

Thousands of residents stayed outside their homes for hours in many towns due to the earthquake and tsunami scare, including in some that were drenched by an overnight downpour, officials said.



A motorcycle passes by a partially damaged grocery store caused by an earthquake in Bayugan City, Agusan del Sur, southern Philippines, Sunday morning, Dec. 3, 2023. A powerful earthquake with a preliminary magnitude of 7.6 struck Saturday, Dec. 2, off the southern Philippine coast, prompting many

villagers to flee their homes in panic after Philippine authorities issued a tsunami warning. Credit: AP Photo/Ivy Marie Mangadlao

Defense Secretary Gilberto Teodoro Jr told a news conference that authorities were assessing the quake's impact but initial reports indicated there were no major damages except for two damaged bridges and pockets of power outages. One death was reported with a few injuries, he said.

Teresito Bacolcol, the head of the Philippine Institute of Volcanology and Seismology, told The AP shortly after the quake hit that his agency advised residents along the coast of Surigao del Sur and Davao Oriental provinces, which were near the epicenter of the undersea quake, to immediately evacuate to higher ground or move farther inland.

Pictures posted on the Facebook account of Hinatuan town in Surigao del Sur province show residents fleeing to higher ground on foot or aboard cars, trucks, motorcycles and tricycle taxis overnight.



In this photo released by the Local Government Unit of Hinatuan, villagers stay inside a temporary evacuation center at Hinatuan town, Surigao del Sur province, southern Philippines, late Saturday, Dec. 2, 2023. A powerful earthquake struck Saturday off the southern Philippine coast, prompting many villagers to flee their homes in panic after Philippine authorities issued a tsunami warning. Credit: Local Government Unit of Hinatuan via AP



In this photo released by the Local Government Unit of Hinatuan, villagers evacuate after an earthquake at Hinatuan town, Surigao del Sur province, southern Philippines, late Saturday, Dec. 2, 2023. Credit: Local Government Unit of Hinatuan via AP



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In this photo provided by the Local Government Unit of Hinatuan, villagers evacuate after an earthquake at Hinatuan town, Surigao del Sur province, southern Philippines, late Saturday, Dec. 2, 2023. A powerful earthquake with a preliminary magnitude of 7.6 struck Saturday off the southern Philippine coast, prompting many villagers to flee their homes in panic around midnight after Philippine authorities issued a tsunami warning. Credit: LGU Hinatuan via AP



In this photo provided by the Local Government Unit of Hinatuan, villagers stay outdoors after an earthquake at Hinatuan town, Surigao del Sur province, southern Philippines, late Saturday, Dec. 2, 2023. A powerful earthquake with a preliminary magnitude of 7.6 struck Saturday off the southern Philippine coast, prompting many villagers to flee their homes in panic around midnight after Philippine authorities issued a tsunami warning. Credit: LGU Hinatuan via AP



In this photo provided by the Local Government Unit of Hinatuan, villagers stay at a temporary evacuation center after an earthquake at Hinatuan town, Surigao del Sur province, southern Philippines, late Saturday, Dec. 2, 2023. A powerful earthquake with a preliminary magnitude of 7.6 struck Saturday off the southern Philippine coast, prompting many villagers to flee their homes in panic around midnight after Philippine authorities issued a tsunami warning. Credit: LGU Hinatuan via AP



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A fish vendor passes by a partially collapsed multipurpose covered court in Tagbina town, Agusan del Sur, southern Philippines on Sunday Dec. 3, 2023. A powerful earthquake struck Saturday off the southern Philippine coast, prompting many villagers to flee their homes in panic around midnight after Philippine authorities issued a tsunami warning. Credit: AP Photo/Ivy Marie Mangadlao



In this handout photo released by the Local Government Unit of Hinatuan, a villager walks beside a damaged house after an earthquake struck Hinatuan town, Surigao del Sur province, southern Philippines on Sunday Dec. 3, 2023. A powerful earthquake struck Saturday off the southern Philippine coast, prompting many villagers to flee their homes in panic around midnight after Philippine authorities issued a tsunami warning. Credit: LGU Hinatuan via AP



This handout photo released by the Local Government Unit of Hinatuan shows a damaged house after an earthquake struck Hinatuan town, Surigao del Sur province, southern Philippines on Sunday Dec. 3, 2023. A powerful earthquake struck Saturday off the southern Philippine coast, prompting many villagers to flee their homes in panic around midnight after Philippine authorities issued a tsunami warning. Credit: LGU Hinatuan via AP

Many villagers who fled to evacuation centers returned to their homes on Sunday, officials said.

After undertaking inspections, civil aviation officials said there was no major damage in several airports in the south and there was no disruption in flights operations.

The Philippines, one of the world's most disaster-prone countries, is often hit by earthquakes and volcanic eruptions due to its location on the Pacific "Ring of Fire," an arc of seismic faults around the ocean. The archipelago is also lashed by about 20 typhoons and storms each year.

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