

Death toll from western Japan earthquakes rises to 126 as rain and snow imperil already shaky ground

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Police officers remove the debris from a fire at a market in Wajima, Ishikawa prefecture, Japan Saturday, Jan. 6, 2024. A series of powerful quakes set off a large fire in the town of Wajima, as well as tsunamis and landslides in the region. Credit: Kyodo News via AP

Aftershocks threatened to bury more homes and block roads crucial for relief shipments, as the death toll from the earthquakes that rattled Japan's western coastline this past week rose to 126 on Saturday.

Among the dead was a 5-year-old boy who had been recovering from injuries after boiling water spilled on him during Monday's 7.6 magnitude earthquake. His condition suddenly worsened and he died Friday, according to Ishikawa prefecture, the hardest-hit region.

Officials warned that roads, already cracked from the dozens of earthquakes that continue to shake the area, could collapse completely. That risk was growing with rain and snow expected overnight and Sunday.

The [death toll](#) on Saturday rose to 126. Wajima city has recorded the highest number of deaths with 69, followed by Suzu with 38. More than 500 people were injured, at least 27 of them seriously.

The temblors left roofs sitting haplessly on roads and everything beneath them crushed flat. Roads were warped like rubber. A fire turned a neighborhood in Wajima to ashes.

More than 200 people were still unaccounted for, although the number has fluctuated. Eleven people were reported trapped under two homes that collapsed in Anamizu.

For Shiro Kokuda, 76, the house in Wajima where he grew up was spared but a nearby temple went up in flames and he was still looking for his friends at evacuation centers.



Police officers conduct a search operation around a burnt market in Wajima, Ishikawa prefecture, Japan Saturday, Jan. 6, 2024. A series of powerful quakes set off a large fire in the town of Wajima, as well as tsunamis and landslides in the region. Credit: Kyodo News via AP

"It's been really tough," he said.

Japan is one of the fastest-aging societies in the world. The population in Ishikawa and nearby areas has dwindled over the years. A fragile economy centered on crafts and tourism was now more imperiled than ever.

In an unusual gesture from nearby North Korea, leader Kim Jong Un sent a message of condolence to Japanese Prime Minister Fumio

Kishida, the official Korean Central News Agency reported Saturday.

Japan earlier received messages expressing sympathy and promises of aid from President Joe Biden and other allies.

Japanese government spokesman Yoshimasa Hayashi told reporters that Japan was grateful to all the messages, including the one from North Korea. Hayashi said the last time Japan received a condolence message from North Korea for a disaster was in 1995.



In this image from a video provided by Osaka Municipal Fire Department, a woman, on a stretcher, who was found trapped under her destroyed house is rescued 72 hours after a strong earthquake in Wajima, Ishikawa prefecture, Japan Thursday, Jan. 4, 2024. The woman was conscious and sent to a hospital, according to Osaka Municipal Fire Department. Credit: Osaka Municipal Fire

Department via AP



A resident checks her destroyed house in Wajima, Ishikawa prefecture, Japan Friday, Jan. 5, 2024. Monday's temblor decimated houses, twisted and scarred roads and scattered boats like toys in the waters, and prompted tsunami warnings. Credit: Kyodo News via AP



A burned-out building and a vehicle are seen after a fire in Wajima in the Noto peninsula, facing the Sea of Japan, northwest of Tokyo, Friday, Jan. 5, 2024, following Monday's deadly earthquake. Credit: AP Photo/Hiro Komae



A resident carries belongings in Suzu, Ishikawa prefecture, Japan Friday, Jan. 5, 2024. Monday's temblor decimated houses, twisted and scarred roads and scattered boats like toys in the waters, and prompted tsunami warnings. Credit: Kyodo News via AP



A road is damaged by Monday's earthquake in Wajima, Ishikawa prefecture, Japan Friday, Jan. 5, 2024. Monday's temblor decimated houses, twisted and scarred roads and scattered boats like toys in the waters, and prompted tsunami warnings. Credit: Kyodo News via AP



People affected by a strong earthquake receive food in Wajima, Ishikawa prefecture, Japan Friday, Jan. 5, 2024. Monday's temblor decimated houses, twisted and scarred roads and scattered boats like toys in the waters, and prompted tsunami warnings. Credit: Kyodo News via AP



In this image from a video provided by Osaka Municipal Fire Department, a woman, center, who was found trapped under her destroyed house is rescued 72 hours after a strong earthquake in Wajima, Ishikawa prefecture, Japan Thursday, Jan. 4, 2024. The woman was conscious and sent to a hospital, according to Osaka Municipal Fire Department. Credit: Osaka Municipal Fire Department via AP



A resident checks her destroyed house in Suzu, Ishikawa prefecture, Japan Friday, Jan. 5, 2024. Monday's temblor decimated houses, twisted and scarred roads and scattered boats like toys in the waters, and prompted tsunami warnings. Credit: Kyodo News via AP



Rescuers conduct a search operation in Suzu, Ishikawa prefecture, Japan Friday, Jan. 5, 2024. Monday's temblor decimated houses, twisted and scarred roads and scattered boats like toys in the waters, and prompted tsunami warnings. Credit: Kyodo News via AP



A man walks between collapsed houses in Suzu, Ishikawa prefecture, Japan Friday, Jan. 5, 2024. Monday's temblor decimated houses, twisted and scarred roads and scattered boats like toys in the waters, and prompted tsunami warnings. Credit: Kyodo News via AP



Members of the Japan Self-Defense Forces stay in their vehicles in front of a landslide that has shut down a road in Wajima in the Noto peninsula, facing the Sea of Japan, northwest of Tokyo, Friday, Jan. 5, 2024, following Monday's deadly earthquake. Credit: AP Photo/Hiro Komae



Police officers conduct a search operation at a burnt market in Wajima, Ishikawa prefecture, Japan Saturday, Jan. 6, 2024. A series of powerful quakes set off a large fire in the town of Wajima, as well as tsunamis and landslides in the region. Credit: Kyodo News via AP



Rescuers conduct a search operation at the site of a landslide in Anamizu town, Ishikawa prefecture, Japan Saturday, Jan. 6, 2024. Monday's temblor decimated houses, twisted and scarred roads and scattered boats like toys in the waters, and prompted tsunami warnings. Credit: Kyodo News via AP



Firefighters conduct a rescue operation at the site of a landslide in Anamizu town, Ishikawa prefecture, Japan Saturday, Jan. 6, 2024. Monday's temblor decimated houses, twisted and scarred roads and scattered boats like toys in the waters, and prompted tsunami warnings. Credit: Kyodo News via AP

Along Japan's coastline, power was gradually being restored, but water supplies were still short. Emergency water systems were also damaged.

Thousands of troops were flying and trucking in water, food and medicine to the more than 30,000 people who had evacuated to auditoriums, schools and other facilities.

The nationally circulated Yomiuri newspaper reported that its aerial study had located more than 100 landslides in the area, and some were blocking lifeline roads.

The urgency of the rescue operations intensified as the days wore on. But some have clung to life, trapped under pillars and walls, and were freed.

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