HEALTH CARE FACILITIES

WASH

in for better health care services

WASH in health care facilities is fundamental for quality care

Ensuring adequate WASH at healthcare facilities minimizes the risk of infection for patients and their families, healthcare workers and surrounding communities. Clean and safe healthcare facilities can increase demand for and trust in services, reinforce the role of healthcare services and staff in setting societal hygiene norms, increase the motivation and retention of health workers, and result in cost savings from infections averted and more efficient service delivery.

Without adequate WASH services in health care facilities, efforts to improve health will be undermined. For example, neonatal sepsis kills 400,000 newborns each year, largely in the developing world. All of these deaths are preventable. This will help to ensure that health care services adhere to the basic principle of ‘do no harm’.

A large number of health care facilities have no or very limited WASH services

Despite the critical need of WASH for quality health service delivery, access to WASH in healthcare facilities is alarmingly poor. A recent global report from UNICEF and WHO reveals that 38% of health care facilities have no source of water. Water coverage estimates reduce by half when factors such as reliability and functionality are taken into consideration. Furthermore, the provision of water and soap or alcohol-based hand rubs for handwashing was absent in over one third of facilities, and almost one fifth of facilities did not have improved sanitation.

Great opportunities for the WASH sector to contribute: Global Action Plan

The responsibility of WASH provision and compliance in health care facilities lies primarily with health authorities and within health systems. However, WASH actors play a critical catalytic role in galvanizing resources and in providing technical expertise on policies and standards, infrastructure options and hygiene behavior change approaches.

To address these challenges, WHO, UNICEF and partners committed at a global meeting in March 2015 to immediately address the situation with the aim to ensure that all health care facilities in all settings have adequate water, sanitation and hygiene services by 2030.
Five change objectives (CO) guide the realization of this global vision and are listed below. Under each objective are key initial approaches that the WASH sector can take to contribute to the vision.

**CO1. WASH in health care facilities is prioritised as a necessary input to achieving global and national health goals, especially those linked to Universal Health Coverage. Key decision makers and thought leaders champion WASH in health care facilities**

In partnership with the global health community, WASH actors must advocate for action to improve access to and investment in WASH in health care facilities. This will require supporting the health sector to embed WASH in health care facilities as a key component of quality Universal Health Coverage, maternal and newborn health targets and infection prevention and control activities, including outbreak prevention and response. WASH advocacy efforts should broaden to engage with health partnerships, institutions and movements, and to encourage cross-sectoral collaboration within development agencies and partners.

**CO2. All countries implement national standards and policies on WASH in health care facilities and have dedicated budgets and human resources to improve and maintain WASH services in health care facilities**

It is important to ensure that all WASH-related work undertaken in health care facilities aligns with the standards as set out in WHO's *Essential Environmental Health Standards in Health Care*. These standards should be adapted for each context and type of health care facility. WASH actors can support adherence to and implementation of national standards if they exist, or work with health authorities to develop, update and implement them if they do not.

**CO3. Global and national monitoring efforts include harmonized core and extended indicators to measure WASH in health care facilities**

The WHO/UNICEF Joint Monitoring Program on Drinking Water and Sanitation is developing a set of basic and extended indicators for assessing access to WASH in health care facilities. These should be incorporated into the WASH and Health sector’s programmes and accountability mechanisms. This includes the monitoring framework to be developed for the SDGs, the current accountability framework for universal health coverage, and in national health and WASH monitoring mechanisms.

**CO4. A strong evidence base exists to inform advocacy and support implementation of WASH in health care facilities**

Undertaking operational research and drawing on existing expertise and knowledge on how to most effectively improve WASH services and practices is needed to inform effective implementation and sustainable services. WASH actors will need to support implementation of locally appropriate and environmentally sound technologies as well as develop new ones. As health care facilities are critical during emergencies and disasters, infrastructure must be resilient and sustainable. In addition, WASH and Health experts need to work collaboratively to support research in understanding drivers of hygiene behaviour change in facilities and among patients, to ensure infrastructure is consistently and correctly used.

**CO5. Health care facility staff, management and patients advocate for improved WASH services and risk-based facility plans support continuous WASH improvements**

Building infrastructure and engaging in behavior change are not enough. Facilities must have management and quality improvement structures to identify and address critical risks, and to ensure processes exist to support operation and maintenance. This requires utilising lessons learned and expertise from WASH risk-based approaches such as Water Safety Plans and Sanitation Safety Planning, and adapting them to health care settings.

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**Get involved and contribute to an important global movement**

WHO and UNICEF, together with partners such as WaterAid, have established four task teams to address the change objectives and collectively realize progress. To learn more and contribute to the effort contact:

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And visit http://www.who.int/water_sanitation_health/en/

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*A webspace dedicated to this effort is coming soon — stay tuned!*