

27 March 2020

COVID-19 Prevention & Response

UNICEF WASH – Snapshot of global, regional and country-level response

Background

The Novel Coronavirus (COVID-2019) epidemic has now spread to at least 162 countries and territories. On 30 January 2020, the World Health Organization (WHO) declared the COVID-2019 outbreak a 'Public Health Emergency of International Concern' at the recommendation of the International Health Regulations Emergency Committee. As of 25 March 2020, over 413,460 laboratory-confirmed cases and more than 18,430 deaths had been reported, among both adults and children (WHO sitrep-65).

Basic water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) services and behaviours are essential for slowing down the spread of COVID-19. In addition, WASH services, supplies and hygiene behaviours risk being disrupted by the outbreak, the responses to it, and the socio-economic effects of the pandemic. UNICEF's WASH response is aligned with global and national strategies designed to: prevent and control the transmission of the disease; mitigate socio-economic impacts of the outbreak; and build resilience against future outbreaks, with a focus on children.

Making the most of the organization's large operational footprint, UNICEF's COVID-19 response is truly global: UNICEF's global COVID-19 appeal covers all 7 regions that UNICEF works in. **As of 23 March, 105 UNICEF Country Offices (CO) have developed country response plans**, with more to come. UNICEF produced a Global Situation Report on Covid-19 Response activities as of [15 March 2020](#).

This note provides a **snapshot** of what UNICEF's WASH programme is doing to contribute to the Covid-19 response.

UNICEF WASH Programme contribution to the COVID-19 Response

The overall objective of UNICEF's WASH response is to support affected, at-risk, low-capacity and fragile countries to secure WASH services and IPC in Health facilities and sustain availability and access to WASH services and products in schools, households and community settings.

The WASH components of UNICEF country response plans are structured around three main areas of work:

1. Hygiene programming
2. Infection prevention and control in health care facilities (HCF), schools, communities and households
3. Impacts on Essential WASH Services and Product Supply Chains

To ensure the quality and effectiveness of the response, WHO and UNICEF have developed a [WASH Technical Brief : Water, sanitation, hygiene and waste management for COVID-19](#) that provides the latest evidence and information on WASH risks and practices. Additionally, UNICEF has developed practical [Programming Guidance for Country Offices for WASH Covid Response](#) in the areas of hygiene promotion; IPC in HCF, schools, communities and households; and mitigating impacts on WASH services and products.

Globally, UNICEF has been actively engaging WASH sector partners and stakeholder through the Global WASH Cluster (GWC) and Sanitation and Water for All Partnership (SWA), in close collaboration with WHO WASH team, as well as using UNICEF's media channels to build public awareness and support- [FACT SHEET: Handwashing with soap, critical in the fight against coronavirus, is 'out of reach' for billions](#).

The response to the COVID-19 outbreak is a multisectoral, multi-stakeholder response. COs WASH programming is fully coordinated with MoH/WHO/Health actors as part of the national **COVID-19 coordination mechanism** set-up, enabling COs WASH section and partners to prioritize and integrate WASH interventions.

Area 1. Hygiene programming: Given the importance of handwashing and hygiene practices to prevent COVID-19, all country response plans include a strong hygiene programming component.

Description of activities: Responses are tailored to the specific COVID-19 transmission routes (respiratory and contact with surfaces). They include consideration of the existing hygiene programmes, analysis of internal and partners' capacity to scale-up interventions, a review and adaptation of existing information-education-communication materials, identifying and partnering with local and social media for mass diffusion of messages, and the continuity or extension of community-based activities in populations less likely to be reached by media to promote safe practices while protecting field workers against the transmission.

Area 2. Infection prevention and control in health care facilities, schools, communities and households: Most country response plans include a strong infection prevention and control (IPC) component. Many COs work with national government to strengthen and scale-up the WASH sector response ensure access to basic WASH services for affected households through strategy, plans, coordination, development of standards, programme design, implementation, monitoring and reporting, as well as through capacity development of frontline workers.

Description of activities:

In Health Care Facilities activities target the application of IPC protocols in facilities expected to receive an influx of patients or used as screening points; an analysis of existing gaps, using simplified and COVID-19 specific assessment tools, followed by the provision of hygiene and cleaning materials, while ensuring water and sanitation services are functioning.

In communities, hygiene and water access is enhanced in public spaces and particular settings identified at risk in affected areas, such as schools/universities (if open), residences for elderly/homeless/disabled persons, detention facilities, as well as IDP & refugee settlements, and other community settings;

In households, communities and public facilities (other than health care facilities) with suspected cases, the core goal is to ensure access to water and essential hygiene supplies for safe hygiene. Particular attention is paid to quarantined families or populations, especially in vulnerable environment (slums, IDPs/refugees, social residences, orphanages, etc.) and populations with special needs (e.g. disabilities),

Area 3. Mitigating Impacts on Essential WASH Services and Product Supply Chains: At this stage of the pandemic, the extent of the impact on WASH is only starting to be understood. We anticipate this will become a major part of country response plans as the situation evolves and are working across HQ, Regional Offices and Country Offices to analyze and include this aspect in country plans. UNICEF wants to monitor and help mitigate through working with government, private sector and services providers.

Description of activities: Mitigate and monitor impacts from the pandemic, and its response, at two levels:

- limitation of access to basic WASH services, as a result of supply stock-outs, price increases, loss of income, lack of personnel to operate water and sanitation systems
- the impact of lockdowns on lifesaving humanitarian programmes, inability to continue delivering essential WASH services to populations already affected by severe and protracted crisis.

Action Update: What Countries and Regions are already doing- examples from the field

Brazil – Protecting the most vulnerable: In Brazil, the government is leading a strong response to the COVID-19 outbreak. UNICEF is complementing the government's efforts by targeting communities of Venezuelan migrants in the State of Roraima and three other cities to which migrants have been relocated. UNICEF will conduct a rapid needs assessment among the migrant communities, and deliver appropriate hygiene and preventive messages on Coronavirus as well as a tailored handwashing campaign. UNICEF will also provide critical WASH and hygiene items to both the official and spontaneous shelters where migrants stay.

Bangladesh – Preventing an outbreak in Cox’s Bazar: Bangladesh hosts over 855,000 Rohingya refugees in Cox’s Bazar district who live in densely populated bamboo and tarpaulin shelters, many living in very precarious conditions. If there were to be a case of COVID-19, the risk of spread would be very high. UNICEF is working with the government and partners to develop a comprehensive communication package, including media spots and FAQs, posters, leaflets, banners in English, Bengali and Burmese.

UNICEF’s **East Asia and Pacific Regional Office has been at the forefront of the global response.** On 13 February UNICEF convened a meeting of the regional “WASH in Emergencies” coalition, involving ECHO, IFRC and ICRC, to take stock of the evolving situation and to map partners’ responses to the outbreak. The UNICEF office is **providing life-saving supplies**, including personal protective equipment (PPE) in **China, Lao PDR, Malaysia, Papua New Guinea and Pacific Island countries** to support the control of transmission in healthcare settings and communities, in a situation where supplies are no longer sourced locally.

In **Vanuatu**, where elections are being held, handwashing stations are being installed at voting stations. In **Fiji**, disinfectant is being distributed in markets to keep them clean and safe, alongside an awareness raising campaign. In the **Federated States of Micronesia**, school principals are being trained on WASH, and handwashing stations are being installed in schools.



Several offices, including **Cambodia, the Philippines, Mongolia, Myanmar and Viet Nam** are running handwashing campaigns tailored to local audiences and languages. The Regional Office WASH team worked with the Communications team to create a risk communication media package, adapted from a version developed by WHO. See left - poster from Cambodia

Lebanon and Iraq: UNICEF is helping to procure and distribute critical items, including soap, hand-sanitizer, disinfectant and personal protection equipment, for use in schools, health facilities, and public spaces. We are also working with the Ministries of Education and Health to develop and implement guidelines for safe school operations and safe primary health care services during a COVID-19 outbreak (e.g. promotion of hand and respiratory hygiene, screening and referral of suspected cases, as appropriate), and education/awareness about COVID-19 prevention.

In **Venezuela**, the UNICEF Country Office is supporting one of the key hospitals, with cleaning and hygiene supplies, an electrolytic chlorinator and pumps, and training and technical assistance in infection prevention and control.

In **Burkina Faso**, UNICEF, with partners, is increasing access to water and disinfection products and accelerating the distribution of handwashers and soap in the country, particularly in areas with a high concentration of displaced population. UNICEF recently teamed up with Burkina Faso hip-hop legend Smarty on a public awareness campaign. The artist composed a song “*Alerte CORONA*” to dispel myths about the virus and demonstrate the best ways to protect against infection and transmission.

Challenges and ways that UNICEF is responding:

Double burden in countries that are already dealing with humanitarian crises: In these situations, there is a risk that host governments and humanitarian communities are unable to deliver life-saving services. Further, people affected by existing crises are likely to be more vulnerable to the coronavirus if their living conditions already involve poor WASH and limited social safeguards. UNICEF is prioritizing support to these countries.

Speed is of the essence for this response: UNICEF COs have used their existing programming as entry points for the COVID-19 response. Many COs are scaling up hygiene promotion campaigns and strengthening existing partnerships with civil society organizations to include a COVID-19 response element.

Disruption to markets and supply chains: Essential WASH supplies are in short supply. Supply Division in Copenhagen is working with WASH suppliers to map and monitor supply chains, including local markets. WASH is working with the UNICEF division of Private Fundraising and Partnerships, National Committees and key donors to mobilize individual companies, like Unilever, to respond and to find ways to work across industry groups e.g. convening a consortium of soap and disinfectant manufacturers.

COVID-19 requires a truly global response: Demand for support and technical advice is coming even from high- and middle-income countries where we do not have WASH programmes. Country plans include upstream work and advocacy to promote social safety nets for the most vulnerable. This should include access to WASH services, including through the local private sector.

WASH Response budget

The budget for UNICEF's WASH response is reflected in the [UNICEF Humanitarian Action for Children Appeal](#) that is part of the [UN Global Humanitarian Response plan for COVID-19](#).

- Provision of critical medical and water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) supplies and improving infection prevention and control (IPC): Total estimated Requirements: **USD\$ 190,759,506**
- Risk communication and community engagement (RCCE), which includes Effective handwashing and hygiene practices and other changes in behaviour are the key to slowing the transmission of the virus: Total estimated Requirements: **USD\$ 104,713,007**

Annex A - List of countries with a response plan

UNICEF Region	Countries
ROSA (8)	Pakistan, Nepal, Bangladesh, Afghanistan, India, Bhutan, Maldives, Sri Lanka
EAPRO (14)	Indonesia, Myanmar, Cambodia, Lao, PNG, China, Thailand, DPRK, Viet Nam, Philippines, Pacific/Fiji, Mongolia, Timor Leste, Malaysia
MENA (9)	Iraq, Lebanon, Iran, Syria, Jordan, Libya, Djibouti, Sudan, State of Palestine
ECARO (20)	Rep of Uzbekistan, Georgia, Republic of Turkmenistan, Tajikistan, Serbia, Ukraine, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Armenia, Romania, Albania, Bulgaria, Azerbaijan, North Macedonia, Moldova, Kosovo (UNSCR), Belarus, Kazakhstan, Republic of Kyrgyzstan, Republic of Montenegro
ESARO (7)	Kenya, Swaziland, Ethiopia, Somalia, United Republic of Tanzania, Angola, Zambia
WCARO (24)	Benin, DRC, Nigeria, Burkina Faso, Cote d'Ivoire, Central African Republic, Togo, Senegal, Niger, Republic of Cameroon, Congo, Guinea Bissau, Sierra Leone, Chad, Liberia, Mali, Guinea, Gambia, Ghana, Mauritania, Sao Tome & Principe, Gabon, Cabo Verde, Equatorial Guinea
LACRO (23)	Argentina, Colombia, Venezuela, Bolivia, Haiti, Guyana, Suriname, Mexico, Paraguay, Brazil, El Salvador, Cuba, Eastern Caribbean Area Office (12 countries and territories), Nicaragua, Peru, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Chile, Belize, Guatemala, Panama, Uruguay, Jamaica

Contact: Kelly Ann Naylor, UNICEF Associate Director- Water Sanitation and Hygiene, kanaylor@unicef.org