

WATER, SANITATION AND HYGIENE

The First Line of Defense in the Battle Against COVID-19



The COVID-19 virus is creating a humanitarian and economic crisis without precedent in recent times.

Safely managed water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) services are an essential part of preventing and protecting human health during infectious disease outbreaks, including the current COVID-19 pandemic.

Safely managed WASH services are also critical during the recovery phase of a disease outbreak to mitigate secondary impacts on community livelihoods and wellbeing.

Action in the WASH sector is therefore critical for containing the virus, lowering its immediate impact and aftermath, and building future resilience to infectious disease outbreaks.

WASH priorities within the World Bank's COVID-19 response

Three priority areas are identified as part of the emergency response:



Safe WASH services in health care facilities (HCFs) to deliver quality health services; protect patients, health workers, and staff; and to prevent further transmission. The WASH in Health Care Facilities Global Base-

line Report (JMP, 2019) highlighted that one in four HCFs lacks basic water service (affecting more than 900 million people), one in five HCFs has no sanitation service (affecting about 1.5 billion people), and one in six HCFs has no hygiene service. During an infectious disease outbreak, services should meet minimum quality standards and should be separated for infected versus non-infected patients. Support should ensure services are not disrupted and products such as soap and alcohol-based hand rubs are available. These services should also be available in temporary HCFs and quarantine sites.



Improving handwashing behavior, food hygiene, and safe water practices. Materials for handwashing and hygiene may include provision of fixed and portable handwashing facilities, purchase of soap and alcohol-based hand rubs, provision of water supplies for handwashing, and point of use water treatment.

Schools, workplaces, markets, transport stations, and other areas where people gather all require easy access to handwashing facilities and water and soap for handwashing. Proven behavior change techniques can help increase the frequency and improve the practice of critical hygiene behaviors. Resources such as the [Global Handwashing Partnership](#) can be tapped to mobilize private, public, and civil society actors to support developing messaging and materials to respond to COVID-19 outbreaks in country.



Emergency support to secure and extend water and sanitation service provision, including:

- **Rapid water service and sanitation provision for communities, health care facilities, and schools** is critical to enable handwashing, hygiene, and disinfection. According to [UN Habitat](#), COVID-19 will hit the world's most vulnerable people the most, many of whom live in informal settlements and rural community settings. Providing quick, just-in-time community water access points/water kiosks (including provision of soap) in unserved urban and rural areas, and for unserved HCFs and schools is critical. This could include: (i) provision and

operation of compact water treatment plants; (ii) construction and operation of water points and sanitation facilities to deliver water in strategic urban or rural points; and/or (iii) provision and operation of trucks for water delivery (bottled, sachets) and water tankers, including adequate water storage to service operators.

- **Support to water supply and sanitation (WSS) service providers** to prepare emergency plans and ensure continuity of service delivery through inter alia: provision of water treatment chemicals and spare parts, availability of fuel for pumps and treatment, maintaining staffing levels, providing protective equipment for utility staff and salary supplements to compensate for the additional work-loads.

The Water Global Practice is Providing Emergency Support and Strengthening Client Country Responses



Supporting the design and inclusion of WASH interventions in full range of emergency financing packages that are being developed. This builds on the guidance that includes templates and materials for new operations to address COVID-19 and includes everything from technical assistance to financing to policy advice.

Ensuring that our local staff have the support, knowledge and resources to assist our country counterparts for emergency responses as well as medium term mitigation and resilience responses



Restructuring projects to rapidly disburse funding to keep WASH services running. Interventions to support these responses are using the full breadth of Bank lending instruments, including restructuring existing operations, and analytical support. In terms of the analytical support, we have notified our leadership teams that financing can be accessed through our Water Expertise Facility and other instruments, as necessary.



GWSP is a Key Part of this Response

The Global Water Security & Sanitation Partnership (GWSP) is helping clients overcome some of the major challenges they are facing:



FCV affected countries already have weak health systems and limited capacity. FCV affected countries are among the least able to respond to the COVID19 crisis. GWSP's efforts in Yemen are an example of rapid response to an ongoing health epidemic – in this case, cholera - aiming at preparedness and prevention in an FCV context, which can inform current operations. The Yemen project focuses on bulk chlorination of water sources and supporting essential staff costs for keeping key services and facilities running. The [Yemen Wash Poverty Diagnostic](#) funded by GWSP helped make the case for two rounds of IDA financing for water and sanitation under this project – an initial \$100m for FY18 plus an additional \$37m in FY19. GWSP also catalyzed other analytical work, including lessons and insights around partnerships, resilience and the service chain.



Many countries have only recently recovered from other pandemics: Bank staff who worked on the 2014 Ebola crisis and are working on the frontlines of this crisis are reporting back that many of the measures implemented then are being revived now – for example, in certain countries, people have to wash their hands before they walk into a supermarket or office and have their temperature taken. However, the underlying issues of poor access to WASH still exist. The Bank and GWSP are focusing on ensuring WSS utilities in big cities do not have to reduce services or stop functioning due to a lack of cash for essential running costs such as water treatment chemicals, fuel, spare parts and staff costs.



Sanitation workers and those without sanitation in urban areas were already vulnerable: Many people in urban slums live without adequate sanitation, and [sanitation workers](#) - the men and women who empty pits and septic tanks, clean toilets, sewers and manholes, and operate pumping stations and treatment plants – often face extreme health hazards and safety risks on the job. Through GWSP-supported initiatives on [Citywide Inclusive Sanitation \(CWIS\)](#) and sanitation workers, the World Bank and partners are providing guidance to ensure slum-dwellers and sanitation workers can be protected from infection.



In addition, GWSP resources are helping the Water GP establish a worldwide network with client countries, development partners, leading utilities and water technology experts to share in a simple portal good practices, technical advice and innovative solutions to deal with the different stages of this COVID-19 crisis. This collaborative platform is providing quick, just-in-time support to governments and utilities developing solutions based on different experiences from leading utilities and other industry players in addressing the impacts of the crisis on water supply and sanitation services.

Water Global Practice on the Frontlines – WASH in Action

- **Democratic Republic of Congo:** The [DRC Strategic Preparedness and Response Project \(SPRP\)](#) is one of the first World Bank projects that includes a dedicated WASH response to COVID-19. It includes a communications campaign to ensure people know about the importance of handwashing and physical distancing, utilizing broadcast media, digital tools and social media to share news, provide guidance and counter any misinformation. It also aims to ensure that doctors, nurses, staff and patients – both those with COVID-19 and those seeking treatment for other maladies - have access to WASH in healthcare facilities. That's because all too often, WASH services are lacking even in the places where people go to seek treatment.



An existing project will be financing 20 new shared water points in densely populated areas currently lacking access, as well as financing dozens of new handwashing stations in public locations such as markets and large intersections.

- **Ethiopia:** Resources for the [Second Urban Water Supply and Sanitation Project](#) were urgently mobilized to respond to the COVID-19 emergency. They are already providing much-needed support in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia's capital. In addition to working closely with the Ministry of Health and the Addis Ababa Water and Sewerage Authority to ensure all healthcare facilities and isolation centers have around-the-clock access to water, water pumps and boreholes in Addis are being replaced and rehabilitated so those living in this dense urban area have water. The World Bank is also working with government counterparts to quickly develop a list of the emergency rehabilitation activities that will be needed in secondary towns.



The COVID-19 [Emergency Response and Health Systems Preparedness Project](#) will also support communications and information outreach activities to encourage behavioral change, such as handwashing and sanitation.



- **Sri Lanka:** The [Sri Lanka COVID-19 Emergency Response and Health Systems Preparedness Project](#) will raise public awareness about handwashing and promote the importance of hygiene. This information will be timely and accessible to all affected stakeholders, including usage of different languages, addressing cultural sensitivities, and reaching those with illiteracy or disabilities.



- **Haiti:** Haiti's [COVID-19 Emergency Response and Recovery Support](#) project's WASH actions will focus on immediate and medium-term measures. Immediate response measures include purchasing chlorine to ensure that water is clean, and installing handwashing stations, soap and water supply and operations in critical points such as markets, health centers, orphanages, and prisons. It also includes the construction and rehabilitation of WASH infrastructure in COVID19 triage and treatment zones in hospitals and health centers, as well as ensuring safe water and basic sanitation, including waste management disposal in HCF and quarantine shelters. Medium term measures (a 3-6 months timeframe) include ensuring that water utilities have the required financial and safe operational conditions to continue delivering services.

