

Ecological Sanitation during COVID-19

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EDITORIAL

During infectious disease outbreaks, such as the current COVID-19 pandemic, well-managed water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) systems are critical for preventing and protecting human health. Investing in key public health infrastructure, such as water and sanitation systems, is one of the most cost-effective strategies for pandemic preparedness, particularly in resource-constrained settings. In households, neighborhoods, health care facilities, classrooms, and other public areas, clear WASH and waste management procedures serve as barriers to human-to-human transmission of the COVID-19 virus.

WASH services that are well-managed are also essential during the recovery process of a disease outbreak to reduce secondary effects on community livelihoods and well-being. Secondary effects, such as delays in supply chains, failure to pay bills, or panic-buying, have a detrimental impact on the reliability and consistency of water and sanitation facilities, as well as the ability of impacted households to access and pay for WASH services and products (such as soap, point-of-use water care, or menstrual hygiene products), and the ability of schools, hospitals, and other public institutions to provide WASH services and products. Secondary effects, if not handled properly, will increase the risk of further spreading water-borne diseases, including disease outbreaks such as cholera, particularly in areas where the disease is endemic. As a result, action in the WASH sector is crucial for both controlling the virus and mitigating its immediate effect and implications. As part of the emergency response, three priority areas have been identified:

To provide quality health services, protect patients, health personnel, and staff, and avoid further transmission, health care facilities (HCFs) must provide safe WASH services. According to the WASH in Health Care Facilities Global Baseline Study (JMP, 2019), one out of every four HCFs does not have basic water service (affecting over 900 million people), and one out of every five HCFs does not have sanitation service. During an outbreak of an infectious disease, facilities should follow minimum quality requirements and be divided between infected and non-infected patients.

Services should not be interrupted, and items such as soap and alcohol-based hand rubs should be available. These facilities should be available in HCFs and quarantine sites that are temporary.

Handwashing, food sanitation, and clean water practices are all being improved. Provision of fixed and portable handwashing facilities, procurement of soap and alcohol-based hand rubs, provision of handwashing water supplies, and point-of-use water treatment are all examples of materials for handwashing and hygiene. Handwashing facilities, as well as water and soap, are needed in schools, offices, markets, transportation stations, and other places where people congregate. Established behavior modification strategies can help people perform essential grooming practices more often and more efficiently.

Support for securing and expanding water and sanitation services, including:

1. To allow handwashing, hygiene, and disinfection, communities, health care facilities, and schools need access to clean water and sanitation quickly and at a low cost. COVID-19, according to UN Habitat, would disproportionately impact the world's most marginalized people, many of whom live in informal settlements and rural communities. Who live in rural communities and informal settlements? It is essential to provide fast, just-in-time community water access points/water kiosks (with soap) in unserved urban and rural areas, as well as for unserved HCFs and schools. This may include the following:
2. Provision and operation of compact water treatment plants
3. Construction and operation of water points and sanitation facilities to deliver water in strategic urban or rural points
4. Provision and operation of trucks for water delivery (bottled, sachets) and water tankers, including adequate water storage to service operators' solvents.

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