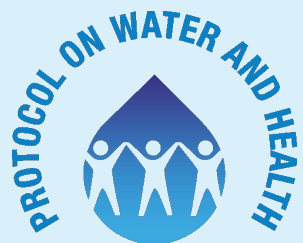


# The Protocol on Water and Health and the COVID-19 pandemic: Relevance, lessons learned and future perspectives

**12<sup>th</sup> meeting of the Task Force on Target Setting and Reporting (17 November 2021)**

**Protocol on Water and Health**

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# Background

- The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted the critical role of WASH services as a first line of defense in preventing and controlling the spread of infectious disease
- The World Health Assembly resolution 73.1 “COVID-19 response” identifies WASH as a central component and calls upon countries “*to take measures to support access to safe water, sanitation and hygiene, and infection prevention and control, ensuring that adequate attention is paid to the promotion of personal hygienic measures in all settings, including humanitarian settings, and particularly in health facilities.*”

# Relevance and significance

- Hand hygiene
- Sanitation and wastewater management
- Drinking-water supply
- Water supply in buildings
- WASH in health care facilities
- WASH in schools
- WASH in public places and vulnerable settings
- Environmental surveillance of wastewater

# Target setting

- Investment in WASH is a central policy prescription for a healthy and green recovery from the pandemic
- Review and revision of national targets and action plans under the Protocol, considering lessons learned from the pandemic in the response to and recovery from COVID-19
- Link the (revised) WASH targets to preparedness, response and recovery programmes and measures for COVID-19 and secure appropriate investment and funding

# Examples of target setting areas /1

| PREVENTION OF WATER-RELATED DISEASE  | INSTITUTIONAL WASH  |
|--|---|
| Improve surveillance of water supply and sanitation systems in the community, including in places where vulnerable groups are present                | Issue national guidance on reopening schools and contingency plans to support schools in restoring WASH services                  |
| Establish procedures for the safe recommissioning of buildings   | Establish requirements and ensure regular surveillance of WASH conditions in schools and health care facilities                   |
| Establish procedures for prevention and control of <i>Legionella</i> in building plumbing systems  | Undertake systematic national assessments of WASH conditions in health care facilities and schools                                |
| Ensure universal access to hand washing facilities in public places and transport hubs and/or develop a roadmap to ensure hand hygiene for all       | Set requirements for the installation and maintenance of hand washing facilities and ensure the provision of supplies (e.g. soap) |
| Introduce a programme for environmental surveillance of SARS-CoV-2 and other disease agents in wastewater of communities and vulnerable institutions | Ensure safe WASH and adequate waste management, environmental cleaning and disinfection practices in health care facilities       |

# Examples of target setting areas /2

| SMALL-SCALE SYSTEMS   | SAFE MANAGEMENT   |
|---|---|
| Implement local health education programmes, including focus on community-based action on hand hygiene promotion and behaviour change   | Stipulate adoption of WSPs and SSPs to ensure safe management practices by operators, including under pandemic circumstances  |
| Advocate small-scale providers to provide sufficient amounts of safe water to allow for IPC measures in health care facilities and hand hygiene in homes, public and institutional settings | Review and update emergency response and contingency plans for water supply and sanitation systems, taking stock of the lessons learned from the pandemic, including “essential staffing” arrangements, and link them with local/national contingency plans |
| Establish requirements for the safe management of on-site sanitation systems, incl. containment, emptying, transport, treatment and disposal  | Establish procedures to maintain supply chains and adequate stocking of treatment chemicals, disinfectants and other essential supplies, incl. PPE for water and sanitation workers   |
| Establish, enforce and/or improve surveillance of small-scale water supply and sanitation systems   | Review and update national guidelines for safe management of water supply and sanitation systems, including consideration of pandemic aspects   |

# Examples of target setting areas /3

| EQUITABLE ACCESS   | CLIMATE RESILIENCE  |
|--|---|
| Prioritise providing inclusive WASH services for marginalized and vulnerable groups as the most vulnerable to COVID-19   | Promote climate-resilient WSPs to ensure reliable and sustainable drinking-water service provision that continuous to prevent water-related disease in a changing climate |
| Ensure access to WASH in public spaces to allow access to such services by the general public and homeless during lockdown measures  |   |
| Undertake post-COVID systematic equity assessments by using the <i>Equitable Access Score-card</i> addressing special challenges faced by vulnerable and disadvantaged population groups | Promote uptake SSPs to ensure safe management of wastewater reuse (e.g. in agriculture) as a frequent adaptation measure to climate-induced water scarcity                |
| Advocate for the inclusion of WASH services in economic response packages to support vulnerable, crisis-affected households facing financial difficulties due to the pandemic            |   |