WASH inclusive COVID-19 preparedness and response actions: experiences in the pan-European region

Regional Workshop on Equitable Access to Water and Sanitation, 13-14 June 2022

Enkhtsetseg Shinee
WHO European Centre for Environmental Health
COVID-19 pandemic is more than a health crisis; it is a socio-economic crisis, a humanitarian crisis, a security crisis, and a human rights crisis.

Water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) services – a first line of defence in preventing and controlling the spread of COVID-19 and other infectious diseases.

WHA resolution on COVID-19 response... take measures to support access to safe WASH and IPC, ... promotion of personal hygienic measures in all settings, including humanitarian settings, and particularly in health facilities.
Recommended actions on WASH to prevent spread of COVID-19
Making hand hygiene accessible to all

- Develop national roadmaps to ensure universal HH
- Provide universal access to public HH stations
- Make HH obligatory in buildings and public transport facilities
- Provide access to HH facilities and practices in health care facilities

Political leadership

- Responding to immediate emergency: controlling the outbreak
- Rebuilding infrastructure and services
- Reimagining a culture of hygiene at all levels of society
To what extent national plans for COVID-19 preparedness and response address WASH?

- UN-Water Global Analysis and Assessment of Sanitation and Drinking-water (GLAAS), implemented by WHO
- Monitoring progress towards universal, sustainable WASH systems and services to all, especially unserved and disadvantaged groups as part of the SDGs
- Provides a useful situation analysis of the WASH sector
- GLAAS 2021-2022 country survey:
  - More comprehensive questions on hand hygiene
  - New question on WASH in COVID-19 preparedness and response plans
- Data analysed for 19 participating countries in the pan-European region

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Country actions: prioritising hand hygiene

Creating an enabling environment and scaling-up hand hygiene in different settings

• **Establish regulatory requirements** for hand hygiene
• **Guidelines and SOPs** or guidance for different settings
• **Enforce** the requirements in practice:
  • Homes
  • Public settings (markets, transport hubs etc)
  • Health care facilities
  • Educational facilities
  • Long-term care facilities
• **Procurement** of supplies to ensure continued availability of HH products
• **Local production of alcohol-based hand sanitizer**
• Provision of **handwashing stations** and dispensers with disinfectants
• **Monitoring compliance** with standard precautions, including HH
• Promotion and HH **behaviour change** activities

Responding to immediate emergency: controlling the outbreak
Rebuilding infrastructure and services
Reimagining a culture of hygiene at all levels of society
Ensuring safe operation of water supply and sanitation services

Examples of measures and approaches

- Recommendations for enhanced hygiene and sanitation in settings for vulnerable groups
- Sustain safe operation and protect workers health
- Specific guidance and additional measures to ensure continued supply of drinking water and sanitation services
- Recommendations for building water supply systems during temporary closure
- Assessment and control of risks by implementing water safety plans
- Local preparedness and response plans: measures to ensure continued water and sanitation service
- Improve IPC, WASH and waste management in health care facilities
- Monitoring of WASH in schools and health care facilities
- Environmental surveillance of SAR-COV-2 in wastewater
- Social measures: prohibit suspension of communal services if service fee is not paid or payment delayed
- Allocation of additional funds for disinfectants, PPE and environmental cleaning
Implications on WASH services

- **Vulnerable groups** who are most at risk of infections are not always targeted
- **Operational** and **financial challenges** of water supply and sanitation systems due to high service demand (i.e. increased hospital admissions)
- Increased water consumption, combined with deficient recharge of aquifers, resulting in **restrictions of water supply**
- Temporary closure of buildings may lead to **water quality** incidents and **health risks** (i.e. Legionella, hazardous chemicals leaching from pipes). Need to establishing the procedures for **safe recommissioning** of buildings
- **Supply chain disruptions** and shortage of water treatment chemicals, disinfectants and other essential supplies
- ** Interruption of WASH services** due to reduced **manpower**
- WASH plans are not sufficiently backed up by **funding** and investment

- Prioritise evidence informed interventions for equitable WASH services, inclusive of vulnerable groups
- Reflect on lessons learned from the pandemic for healthy recovery and strengthen the preparedness and resilience of WASH systems and services to future crisis and emergencies
Thank you

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