



World Health
Organization

Sanitation, wastewater and recreational water

AIDE-MÉMOIRE

For enhanced country action on sanitation, wastewater and recreational water



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Almost half of the global population uses unsafely managed sanitation services, including the lack of proper toilets or latrines, open defecation, or inadequate waste treatment. Proper sanitation practices reduce the risk of waterborne diseases (such as cholera and dysentery), stunting, and antimicrobial resistance. Also, it facilitates hygiene, enhancing dignity safety and school attendance. It fosters economic growth, social development and equity.

Safely managed recreational water bodies also contribute positively to health and wellbeing. They provide opportunities for physical activity, relaxation, cultural and religious uses. But these can also be a risk to health if water is polluted and due to physical risks, such as drowning and injuries.

Low- and middle-income countries, and specially women and children, are the most affected by this environmental risk factor.

WHO support to countries

- Advises governments on the development of health-based targets and regulations based on the WHO Guidelines for the safe use of wastewater, excreta and greywater, or the WHO Guidelines on sanitation and health.
- Monitors progress against national targets through: WHO/UNICEF Joint Monitoring Programme for Water Supply, Sanitation and Hygiene (JMP); UN-Water Global Analysis and Assessment of Sanitation and Drinking-Water (GLAAS); WASH accounts using TrackFin methodology; and the monitoring of the safe treatment and reuse of wastewater.
- Provides estimates of the health impacts of poor water, sanitation and health (WASH) and provides national data, reporting on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).
- Provides technical support in specific areas such as antimicrobial resistance.
- Provides a compendium of available interventions to safely manage sanitation services, wastewater and recreational water.
- Highlights co-benefits of reducing exposure to poor WASH to other sectors, such as improving food safety, and reducing health inequalities.
- Prepares awareness-raising and capacity building materials on sanitation safety such as the Open WHO course on safely managed sanitation and the Sanitation Safety Planning learning hub.
- Provides support for WASH in healthcare facilities by using WASH-FIT (Water and Sanitation for Health Facility Improvement Tool).

✓ Checklist

Situation assessment

- ☐ Monitoring system to assess the proportion of population using safely managed sanitation services in place
- ☐ Monitoring of recreational water in place
- ☐ Risk assessments for sanitation systems conducted

Policies & actions

Sufficient and safe sanitation and hygiene services provided to:

- ☐ households
- ☐ schools
- ☐ workplaces
- ☐ public spaces
- ☐ Sanitation Safety Planning developed
- ☐ Policies to improve access to and use of sanitation services in line with WHO's Guidelines on sanitation and health implemented
- ☐ Handwashing facilities with soap and water in households and public places available
- ☐ National health-based targets for the quality of recreational water bodies (based on WHO guidelines) in place
- ☐ Water Safety Plans (WSPs) for priority bathing sites and pool safety developed

Awareness raising & capacity building

- ☐ Strategies and campaigns to eliminate open defecation implemented (if it is an issue)
- ☐ Regular handwashing promoted
- ☐ Sanitation promotion in training curricula of health professionals included

Key elements for country action

Governance

- The health sector needs to cooperate across sectors, such as health, housing, and industry to achieve safely managed sanitation services, safe use of wastewater and safe recreational water environments.
- Ensure health gains from safe WASH are considered in all relevant policies outside the health sector.
- Increase awareness about the health benefits of ensuring access to safely managed sanitation services and wastewater management, and safe recreational water environments among decision makers and the public.
- Understand the national status of access to sanitation.
- Strengthen systems for regulating sanitation.

Sanitation and wastewater

- Conduct national and local risk assessments for sanitation systems.
- Based on the WHO guidelines, develop/update/adapt national policies and programs.
- Support hand-washing facilities in strategic places, and menstrual hygiene management in toilet design.
- Consider local characteristics and involve the community on the design of sanitation services and implement appropriate and safe systems along the sanitation chain.
- End open defecation by providing safe toilets that contain excreta and use of basic handwashing facilities. Especially in schools, health care facilities, workplaces and public spaces, by supporting adequate policies and raising awareness among the affected population.
- Ensure safe practices where wastewater and excreta are used in agriculture and aquaculture.
- Combat antimicrobial resistance through sanitation and hygiene for infection prevention and through improved wastewater management.
- Protect the rights and dignity of sanitation workers.

Recreational water

- Based on the WHO guideline values, develop/update/adapt national health-based targets for recreational water bodies.
- Develop and implement:
 - recreational Water Safety Plans (WSPs);
 - pool safety plan.
- Provide rescue services and access to emergency response/services.

Awareness raising and capacity building

- Assess sanitation behaviours and their determinants to perform context-specific behaviour change programs.
- Liaise with WASH focal point in relevant ministries and key partners to identify opportunities for joint advocacy.
- Equip the health sector with sufficient staff and resources to sustain their engagement with sanitation.
- Be familiarized with the existing technical resources (e.g., Sanitation safety planning roadmap, WHO water safety webpage).
- Promote hygiene promotion interventions to increase hand washing.
- Raise awareness about climate adaptation options for sanitation systems.
- Include sanitation promotion in training curricula of health professionals.

Additional information:



Main resources:

- <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/sanitation>
- [Sanitation safety](#)
- [Guidelines on sanitation and health](#)
- [Guidelines for the safe use of wastewater, excreta and greywater](#)
- [Compendium of WHO and other UN guidance on health and environment](#) (WHO, 2024)
- [WHO WASH 3-Level SharePoint & Repository](#)

Please note: This aide mémoire (version 1, October 2024) provides summary information on sanitation, wastewater and recreational water. More detail on WASH and other environmental health topics is provided in various other materials. Furthermore, another aide mémoire is provided on drinking water.