

WHO Director-General statement on the UN system-wide strategy for water and sanitation

I join my colleagues in welcoming the [UN System-wide Strategy](#), together with its Collaborative Implementation Plan. Safe water and adequate sanitation and hygiene are essential for realising WHO's mission to promote, provide and protect the health of the world's people.

Since 2021, a global resurgence of cholera has burdened already overwhelmed health systems in dozens of countries. Yet, cholera and other diarrhoeal diseases are entirely preventable through water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) and could help save the lives and improve the well-being of millions of people around the world. Improving WASH is also critical to preventing and managing Neglected Tropical Diseases, health care-associated infections, noncommunicable diseases like arsenicosis, fluorosis and emerging risks relating to pollutants like microplastics.

The UN System-wide action plan on water and sanitation is an important step in bringing coherence to a fragmented landscape, helping UN agencies to coordinate their efforts to support countries in improving WASH infrastructure.

Key priorities for coordination with UN-Water members and partners include implementing WHO's Guidelines for Drinking-water Quality, Sanitation and Health, and our upcoming Guidelines on Hand Hygiene in Community Settings. Many agencies represented in UN-Water promote resources, tools, and convene training that complement these and other WHO norms. Aligning our country support and technical assistance is crucial.

Further coordination could include implementing a One Health approach, reducing agricultural and industrial pollution, integrated water resource management, climate adaptation, and monitoring the strength of WASH systems. We've already seen the benefits of aligning water and sanitation-related monitoring activities, and scaling up WASH in Health Care Facilities.

At a time of increased risk from climate change, overlapping humanitarian crises and disasters, and disease outbreaks, all within an environment of major resource constraints, more effective, cross-sectoral collaboration is essential. WHO is committed to working with our UN-sister agencies and partners in helping countries to build safer and more sustainable water supplies, safely managed sanitation, and adequate hygiene, as we work together to achieve the highest attainable standard of health for all people.