



World Health Organization

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WHO strengthens focus on water, sanitation and hygiene to accelerate elimination of neglected tropical diseases

STOCKHOLM, GENEVA | 27 August 2015 – The World Health Organization (WHO) today unveiled a global plan to better integrate water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) services with four other public health interventions to accelerate progress in eliminating and eradicating neglected tropical diseases (NTDs) by 2020.

"Millions suffer from devastating WASH-related neglected tropical diseases – such as soil-transmitted helminthiasis, guinea-worm disease, trachoma and schistosomiasis – all of which affect mainly children" said Dr Maria Neira, WHO Director for Public Health, Environmental and Social Determinants of Health.

"Solutions exist, such as access to safe water, managing human excreta, improving hygiene, and enhancing targeted environmental management. Such improvements not only lead to improved health, but also reduce poverty."

Targeted water and sanitation interventions are expected to bolster ongoing efforts in tackling the 17 NTDs, which affect more than 1 billion of the world's poorest and most vulnerable populations.

A recent report showed that in 2015 more than 660 million people did not have access to improved water sources. The WHO/UNICEF Joint Monitoring Programme for Water Supply and Sanitation report also showed that almost 2.5 billion people lacked access to improved sanitation. Open defecation and lack of hygiene are also an important risk factors for the transmission of many NTDs. Over half a million lives are lost each year as a result of NTDs.

"Joint planning, resourcing and delivery of WASH interventions are key to eliminating neglected tropical diseases and in achieving many public health and human development goals" said Dr Dirk Engels, Director of the Department of Control of Neglected Tropical Diseases. "The benefits are enormous - from alleviation of suffering through improved outcomes to healthier, wealthier and happier families, communities and nations."

Besides advocating for basic water, sanitation and hygiene, WHO uses four other key interventions in overcoming the global burden of NTDs. The four strategies are: preventive chemotherapy, innovative and intensified disease management, vector control and veterinary public health services. Prioritizing water and sanitation will address the determinants of many NTDs and support WHO's drive for equitable and sustainable universal health coverage.



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The five-year agenda for collaboration outlined in the new *Strategy and Action Plan* demonstrates global commitments for bringing together the WASH and public health spheres. It is in line with World Health Assembly Resolution 64/24 which calls for the formulation of a new, integrated WHO strategy including a specific focus on promotion of sanitation and hygiene behaviour.

Notes to editors:

WHO's Global Strategy on Water, Sanitation and Hygiene for accelerating progress on Neglected Tropical Diseases 2015-2020 and detailed information on NTDs can be found at:

http://www.who.int/water_sanitation_health/en/

http://www.who.int/neglected_diseases/en/

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