

**REGIONAL COMMITTEE FOR THE
EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN**

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WATER, SANITATION AND HYGIENE IN HEALTH CARE FACILITIES

Objectives

The objectives of this event are to:

- raise awareness of the lack of knowledge and attention accorded to water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) services in health care facilities;
- encourage a concerted effort within Member States to assess the current situation and improve WASH services in health care facilities.

Background

The *WASH in health care facilities: global baseline report 2019* of the WHO and UNICEF Joint Monitoring Programme for Water Supply, Sanitation and Hygiene was published in April 2019. It is the first comprehensive global assessment of water, sanitation and hygiene, health care waste management and environmental cleaning in health care facilities. It is complemented by another report *Water, sanitation and hygiene in health care facilities: practical steps to achieve universal access to quality care* that outlines practical actions countries can take to improve WASH in health care facilities. The WASH in health care facilities report represents a compilation and analysis of existing monitoring data on the status of services in health care facilities that countries have already collected and reviewed.

This global baseline report confirms the findings of the first ever global assessment of WASH services in health care facilities undertaken by WHO and UNICEF in 2015 and reveals that 12% of health care facilities had no water services and 21% had no sanitation services. The report further reveals that many health care centres lack basic facilities for hand hygiene and safe segregation and disposal of health care waste.

Failing to provide adequate WASH services in health care facilities undermines efforts to achieve universal health coverage and adversely affects the quality of care, as well as infection prevention and control measures. It also contributes to the unnecessary use of antibiotics and the spread of antimicrobial resistance.

To call attention to this issue of fundamental importance to health and development, the United Nations Secretary-General issued a global call to action on water, sanitation and hygiene in health care facilities in March 2018. The WHO Director-General's report on water, sanitation and hygiene in health care facilities (EB144/30) was presented to the 144th session of the WHO Executive Board in December 2018, and the Seventy-second session of the World Health Assembly in May 2019, outlining the health agenda for improving the situation of water and sanitation in health care facilities. This is a call for health authorities in Member States to: 1) conduct national assessments of the availability and quality of WASH services in health care facilities; 2) establish standards and implement a road map so that every health care facility in every setting has, commensurate with its needs, safely managed and reliable water supplies, sufficient, safely managed and accessible toilets or latrines for patients, caregivers and staff of all sexes, ages and abilities; 3) set pertinent targets within health policies; 4) integrate indicators for safe water, sanitation and hygiene into national monitoring mechanisms to establish baselines, track progress on a regular basis; and 5) promote a safe working environment for all health workers for efficient and safe service delivery. The goal is for ministries of health to assume ownership, mobilize necessary financing for fruitful action to ensure and sustain WASH services in all health care facilities.

Challenges in the Region

There is a lack of knowledge on the situation of WASH conditions in health care facilities within Member States of the Eastern Mediterranean Region; with information on only four countries included in the first global assessment report, and with limited data coverage and quality. The 2019 baseline report presents data entries for only 10 countries in the Region. However, the quality of data available varies widely from almost complete in one country to scarce in the other nine countries.

The situation of WASH services in health care facilities is not reported within health care reporting systems or health information systems within countries. Two attempts, in 2016 and 2017, by the WHO's Regional Centre for Environmental Health Action to gather information for the preparation of a regional assessment generated responses from very few countries with unverifiable and very limited information.

The knowledge gap on the situation of WASH and other environmental health services in health care facilities calls for urgent concerted action by Member States to establish a reporting system on services in health care facilities. Furthermore, there is a pressing need to establish good management practices within health care facilities that are verifiable by a monitoring system.

Way forward

National health authorities in Member States are encouraged to undertake comprehensive national assessments of WASH services in individual health care facilities as an integral part of a situational analysis. Data generated through the comprehensive assessment will: 1) bridge the knowledge gap; 2) facilitate integrating indicators for WASH services in health care facilities into national health information systems for establishing baselines and tracking progress on a regular basis; 3) provide the foundation for identifying needs, developing national standards, developing improvement plans and mobilizing action for enhancing services in individual health care facilities.

Expected outcome

- Member States will be updated on the findings of the regional assessment and provided guidance on developing national frameworks for action to improve WASH services in health care facilities.