Together with ensuring action at the facility level, Ministries of Health and healthcare managers must:

- Improve monitoring systems in coordination with the World Health Organization to agree a common set of indicators for WASH in healthcare facilities that can be tracked through national management information systems and SARA at the national level; and,
- Undertake an in-depth national assessment of WASH at HCF including review of indicators used, and national monitoring systems and,
- Commit financial resources to policies and plans for WASH in healthcare facilities, including for the improvement and maintenance of infrastructure; and,
- Create or strengthen operation and maintenance mechanisms; and,
- Ensure that existing WASH and infection prevention and control standards for public environments are adhered to; and,
- Initiate training and quality improvement programmes for healthcare staff and managers; and,
- Ensure that the responsibility for WASH in healthcare facilities does not 'fall between the cracks' of different Government Ministries; and,
- Improve accountability, clearly delineating responsibilities for WASH and infection prevention and control.

Several immediate actions can lay the groundwork for improving WASH in healthcare facilities. In Asia and the Pacific, all Ministries of Health should assess the current situation in all healthcare facilities to identify main blockages and solutions to bring adequate WASH in healthcare facilities. Baseline information is necessary to be available for the WHO's rapid assessment tool. Such information should be prepared for further discussion at national advocacy workshops or forums in order to define national strategies that ensure that WASH services in all healthcare facilities are accessible and functional in a sustained manner. Additionally, Ministries of Health should develop and/or update the national standards for WASH in healthcare facilities, based on the WHO Essential Environmental Health Standards in Health Care. In the medium term, Ministries of Health should adopt a common set of indicators for WASH in healthcare facilities and include these indicators in the HMIS and SARA at the national level. Ministries of Health should prioritize and implement national standards for WASH in healthcare facilities in a phased manner. Partners in UNICEF, the WHO and WaterAid will work hand-in-hand with governments to achieve these aims.

Establishing, resourcing and monitoring adequate WASH standards in all healthcare facilities is an attainable goal. Together with ensuring that healthcare workers are sufficiently trained and motivated in hygiene practices, and management structures exist to maintain oversight of facilities, this is the combined effort required to ensure the achievement of universal health coverage and improved health outcomes.
The purpose of healthcare facilities is to promote health and healing. Adequate WASH standards in healthcare facilities can significantly reduce the risk of infection for patients, healthcare workers, and visitors. WASH issues, such as hand washing by healthcare staff, patients and visitors, and ensuring quality of water supply, can help to minimize the risk of infection for patients, healthcare workers, and surrounding communities. High standards of cleanliness in healthcare facilities also serve to promote the observance of such practices across society in general.

Inadequate WASH standards in healthcare facilities in many low- and middle-income countries are a major cause for concern. The scale of the problem globally and in Asia and the Pacific is immense. They cause up to 56 percent of all neonatal deaths among hospital-born babies in developing countries, with three quarters occurring in South-East Asia and sub-Saharan Africa. Estimates show that of every hundred hospitalized patients, seven in developed and ten in developing countries will acquire health care-associated infections. A 2014 hygiene survey in Bangladesh found that healthcare workers utilized only 46 percent of hand washing opportunities and only two percent resulted in recommended hand washing practice (see soap or alcohol hand rub). Adequate WASH in healthcare facilities is a necessary condition of a comprehensive health service and vital to improving health outcomes. WASH is also linked to improvements in reproductive health. Between 1965 and 1990, thirty to fifty percent of Asia’s economic growth is likely to result from improvements in WASH in healthcare facilities and its impact on health outcomes.

Across Asia and the Pacific, there is significant stagnation between countries in terms of WASH standards in healthcare facilities. However, some countries, such as DPR and Mongolia, have seen marked improvement in WASH provision. This is likely the result of national strategies and initiatives to make the necessary investment, despite having a limited financial resources capacity. The World Health Organization’s (WHO) 2014 report on Hygiene in Health Care shows that of every hundred hospitalized patients, seven in developed and ten in developing countries will acquire health care-associated infections. The infection rates are highest in countries with weak health systems and healthcare facilities. Some countries, such as Lao People’s Democratic Republic (Lao DPR), in the region have seen marked improvement in WASH provision in healthcare facilities. The large scale of the problem means that addressing it is essential to achieve universal health coverage and improve health outcomes.

The World Health Organization’s Essential Environmental Health Standards in Health Care, the World Health Organization's (WHO) 2014 report on Hygiene in Health Care, shows that of every hundred hospitalized patients, seven in developed and ten in developing countries will acquire health care-associated infections. The infection rates are highest in countries with weak health systems and healthcare facilities. Some countries, such as Lao People’s Democratic Republic (Lao DPR), in the region have seen marked improvement in WASH provision in healthcare facilities. The large scale of the problem means that addressing it is essential to achieve universal health coverage and improve health outcomes.

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The scale of the problem and its impacts

The purpose of healthcare facilities is to promote health and healing. Adequate WASH standards in healthcare facilities in seven of every ten healthcare facilities are a major cause for concern. The scale of the problem globally and in Asia and the Pacific is immense. They cause up to 56 percent of maternal deaths, seven in every ten healthcare facilities do not have a pipeline connection for drinking water and relied on boreholes, wells and water trucks. A 2014 hygiene survey in Bangladesh found that healthcare workers‘ utilised only 46 percent of hand washing opportunities and only two percent resulted in recommended hand washing practice (use of soap or antiseptic solution) for hand cleaning.

Inadequate WASH in healthcare facilities means lives are lost. For example, institutional deliveries can only result in improved maternal and child health outcomes. For example, institutional deliveries can only result in improved maternal and child health outcomes.

The lack of consistent data on WASH provision as part of healthcare facilities is broadly absent. This makes it difficult to measure and make a case for action to improve WASH provision effectively. Many countries lack indicators in their national health information systems (HIS) to monitor and evaluate WASH standards to ensure WASH infrastructure and patient safety. As a result, many countries do not even gather the information do not necessarily understand the problem.

Across Asia and the Pacific, there is significant variation in standards between countries in terms of WASH standards in healthcare facilities. Some countries, such as Lao PDR and Mongolia, have seen marked improvement in their WASH standards in healthcare facilities, together with support from WHO; whilst others such as Solomon Islands have struggled to make the necessary investment, despite having a legal mandate and human resources capacity, due to insufficient political support. Each country faces unique barriers in relation to WASH in healthcare facilities, but the barriers to progress are common across most.
The scale of the problem and its importance

The purpose of healthcare facilities is to promote health and healing. Adequate WASH standards in healthcare facilities, in particular, are needed to ensure that patients are not at risk of acquiring or spreading infections. Good medical practice alone is not enough to address the problem of healthcare-associated infections.

Water and sanitation are human rights that play a vital role in attaining the right to the highest standard of health for all. In 2010, the United Nations General Assembly explicitly recognised “the right to safe and clean drinking water and sanitation as a human right that is essential for the full enjoyment of life and all human rights.” The Fifth South Asian Conference on Sanitation in 2013 recognised sanitation as “a matter of justice and equity, with a powerful multiplier effect that unlocks measurable benefits across society” including in health. The South Asia Association for Regional Cooperation declared that “sanitation is an affront to societies in South Asia, in stark contrast with the rapid economic progress in the region.”

Ensuring safe healthcare facilities: WASH as an organic part of the continuum of healthcare

The World Health Organization’s Essential Environmental Health Standards in Healthcare Guide provides a comprehensive guide to necessary action at the facility level.
CALL FOR ACTION

Several immediate actions can lay the groundwork for improving WASH in healthcare facilities. In Asia and the Pacific, Ministries of Health should ensure the current situation in all healthcare facilities meets WHO standards for WASH in healthcare facilities. Baseline information is available on the WHO’s rapid assessment tool. Such information should be prepared for further discussion at national advocacy workshops or forums in order to establish national policy standards for WASH in healthcare facilities, based on the WHO’s Essential Environmental Health Standards in Health Care. To achieve adequate WASH in healthcare facilities, Ministries of Health should adopt a common set of indicators for WASH in healthcare facilities and include these indicators in the WHO and SARAC at the national level. Ministries of Health should prioritize and implement national standards for WASH in healthcare facilities in a phased manner. Development partners in UNICEF, the WHO and WaterAid will work hand in hand with governments to achieve these aims.

Building, resourcing and monitoring adequate WASH standards in all healthcare facilities is an attainable goal. Together with ensuring that healthcare workers are sufficiently trained and motivated in hygiene practices, and management structures exist to maintain oversight of facilities, this is the concerted effort required to ensure the achievement of universal health coverage and improved health outcomes.

ACTION

Together with ensuring action at the facility level, Ministries of Health and healthcare managers must:

- Improve monitoring systems in coordination with the World Health Organization to agree a common set of indicators for WASH in healthcare facilities that can be tracked through national management information systems and SARAC at the national level; and,
- Undertake an in-depth national assessment of WASH at HCF including review of indicators used, and national monitoring systems and,
- Commit financial resources to policies and plans for WASH in healthcare facilities, including for the improvement and maintenance of infrastructure; and,
- Create or strengthen operation and maintenance mechanisms; and,
- Ensure that existing WASH and infection prevention and control standards for public environments are adhered to; and,
- Initiate training and quality improvement programmes for healthcare staff and managers; and,
- Ensure that the responsibility for WASH in healthcare facilities does not ‘fall between the cracks’ of different Government Ministries; and,
- Improve accountability, clearly defining responsibilities for WASH and infection prevention and control.

ENDNOTES

1. A set of immediate and medium-term actions can be put into action by Ministries of Health, with the support of development partners Established adequate WASH standards in all healthcare facilities is an attainable goal; and is required to ensure the achievement of universal health coverage and improved health outcomes.

Adequate WASH in healthcare facilities helps ensure quality and safe care and minimises the risk of infection for patients, caregivers, healthcare workers and surrounding communities.

Poor WASH provision in healthcare facilities increases the risk of healthcare acquired infections, and undermines global and national efforts to improve maternal, neonatal and child health.

The issue of WASH in healthcare facilities requires a major consideration of the post-2015 development agenda, and is fundamental for the achievement of the universal health coverage agenda.

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Building, resourcing and monitoring adequate WASH standards in all healthcare facilities is an attainable goal. Together with ensuring that healthcare workers are sufficiently trained and motivated in hygiene practices, and management structures exist to maintain oversight of facilities, this is the concerted effort required to ensure the achievement of universal health coverage and improved health outcomes.

Water, sanitation and hygiene in health care facilities

This note sets out the crucial role of water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) in the provision of quality healthcare. Its aim is to inform health and WASH-responsive Ministries and agencies, as well as regional decision-making forums in Asia and the Pacific.
Together with ensuring action at the facility level, Ministries of Health and healthcare managers must:

- Improve monitoring systems in coordination with the World Health Organization to agree a common set of indicators for WASH in healthcare facilities that can be tracked through national management information systems and SARA at the national level; and,
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- Improve accountability, clearly delineating responsibilities for WASH and infection prevention and control.

Several immediate actions can lay the groundwork for improving WASH in healthcare facilities in Asia and the Pacific. All Ministries of Health should assess the current situation in all healthcare facilities to identify main bottlenecks and inhibitors to having adequate WASH in healthcare facilities. Baseline information can be collected using the WHO’s rapid assessment tool. Such information should be prepared for further discussion at national advocacy workshops or forums in order to define national strategies that ensure that WASH services in all healthcare facilities are accessible and functional in a sustained manner. Additionally, Ministries of Health should develop and/or update the national standards for WASH in healthcare facilities, based on the WHO Essential Environmental Health Standards in Health Care. In the medium term, Ministries of Health should adopt a common set of indicators for WASH in healthcare facilities and include these indicators in the SARA and SARA at the national level. Ministries of Health should prioritize and implement national standards for WASH in healthcare facilities in a phased manner. Development partners in UNICEF, the WHO and WaterAid will work hand-in-hand with governments to achieve this common aim.

Establishing, resourcing and monitoring adequate WASH standards in all healthcare facilities is an achievable goal. Together with ensuring that healthcare workers are sufficiently trained and motivated in hygiene practices, and management structures exist to maintain oversight of facilities, this is the combined effort required to ensure the achievement of universal health coverage and improved health outcomes.