

# COVID-19 Guidance: Prioritising hygiene for workforce health and business resilience



## The need: enabling a safe return to operation following COVID-19

The global COVID-19 (Coronavirus) pandemic has resulted in significant, adverse human and economic impact, highlighting the interconnectivity of workforce health and commercial prosperity. Country-wide lockdowns have thrown supply chains into disarray, upending financial security for local workers and global businesses alike. The IMF<sup>1</sup> has since projected a 3 percent dive in GDP for the year 2020, representing the worst economic downturn in almost a century.

Companies are rapidly implementing mechanisms for financial and operational stabilisation, and hygiene – the often-forgotten component of water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) and health – has become a board-level priority. With no vaccine to prevent or medicine to treat the virus, maintaining physical distancing and handwashing with soap are a first line defence against the spread of COVID-19. But for millions of supply chain workers living in densely populated cities with poor WASH infrastructure, engaging in preventative hygiene behaviour is challenging.

This guidance is for companies seeking to safeguard the health of workers employed in factory and field supply chains through WASH behaviour change interventions, whose health and productivity underpin the resilience of the industry. Predominantly based in developing countries, they are disproportionately vulnerable to COVID-19.

## The challenge: global supply chains

Providing corporate level guidance to employees across countries and in varying work environments is a burgeoning challenge. Supply chain employees are at increased risk of transmission due to the volume of people working in confined proximity around high touch surfaces in WASH-poor environments and

countries. Tailor-made, sector-specific, supply chain action is essential to adequately respond to the varying hygiene behaviour change protocols required for field and factory settings, particularly those in developing countries where workers are disproportionately vulnerable.

Labour conditions have traditionally been deemed a reputational or regulatory business risk but in the context of COVID-19, are also operational risks threatening product quality and control, overall business continuity and more importantly the health of the workers. Revised labour standards and improvements in environmental, social and governance (ESG) reporting may become the norm post COVID-19.

Prioritising WASH in the supply chain, including the workplace and the surrounding communities where workers live, will enable global companies to establish safe return to work conditions, meet business demands and respond to compliance requirements. Looking forward, these measures also contribute substantially to business continuity by building long term resilience against future shocks.

**Coronavirus (COVID-19)**

**How to reduce the risk of infection in field and factory work**

**Symptoms**  
You may have one or more of these symptoms (which are similar to other illnesses such as cold or flu)

High Fever, Cough, Shortness of breath

Frequently washing both hands with soap and water at least 20 seconds.  
• Before and after work.  
• Before eating and touching your face and nose.  
• After going to the toilet, or touching dirt, dust, fluids and frequently touched surfaces.

Cover your nose and mouth when you cough or sneeze. Use a tissue and dispose of it in a closed bin, or sneeze into your elbow. Then wash your hands with soap. Wear a mask on the production line.

If you feel unwell, stay at home. If at work, go to a designated isolation room and notify a manager. Seek immediate medical attention.

Avoid close contact. Maintain at least 2m distance when working in fields and factories (on the production line and in the canteen). Avoid group gatherings, stagger lunchtimes. Use non-contact greetings.

Regularly clean frequently touched surfaces with disinfectant and sanitation facilities. Including door handles, mobile phones, hand rails and drinking taps.

Trusted water is safe to drink. Only drink treated water. Do not share water bottles or cups with others.

**WaterAid**

▲ WaterAid's COVID-19 behaviour guidance for field and factory supply chain workers.



<sup>1</sup> <https://blogs.imf.org/2020/04/14/the-great-lockdown-worst-economic-downturn-since-the-great-depression>

## The solution: WaterAid's expertise in practise

For over a decade WaterAid has worked with leading brands to implement WASH solutions that support the health and productivity potential of their workforce in factory and field contexts, thereby reducing financial and reputational risk to the business. WaterAid recommends a holistic approach to implementation, in the workplace, the supply chain and the surrounding communities where workers live, to contribute to the overall potential of the area and ensure local living conditions don't undermine supply chain interventions.

When responding to COVID-19, comprehensive supply chain risk assessments coupled with proactive implementation of water, sanitation and hygiene infrastructure, communication tools and behaviour change campaigns will be required for effective mitigation. WaterAid can support you to:

### Develop and implement a 'return to work' strategy

- Based upon corporate COVID-19 strategy, develop operational level guidance considering the broader supply chain (owned and operated or beyond) and community
- Perform a risk and needs assessment identifying potential contamination risk points at operational level in factory and field scenarios
- Implement hygiene management plans and infrastructure solutions to reduce transmission risk and future-proof operations
- Facilitate creative process to develop hygiene promotion package materials and resources in alignment with corporate ethos, national standards and local COVID-19 guidelines
- Deliver hygiene behaviour training to employees and key community staff and implement hygiene promotion campaigns as a transition for the business to deliver overtime.

## Water and hygiene behaviour change in action

WaterAid has built strong relationships working with apparel factories on WASH interventions in Bangladesh, where we have provided water, sanitation and hygiene infrastructure solutions and intensive hygiene behaviour programmes to workers and surrounding communities. Following the announcement of COVID-19, we installed additional handwashing facilities and delivered a COVID-19 specific hygiene campaign reaching more than 20,000 workers within one week. We continue to work closely with factory management to enable their safe return to operation post lockdown.



▲ Workers at ready-made garment factory follow WaterAid hygiene protocols. Narayanganj, Bangladesh, 2020.

## Your leadership: act on supply chain WASH

In the face of COVID-19, global businesses are challenged to responsibly manage financial and people risks in their return to operation. These often-competing components are now inextricably linked; employees trust that prudent management action will be taken to safeguard health and income, with businesses in turn relying on the health of employees to ensure production and sales.

With four decades of global WASH expertise and now a partner of global governments in their fight against COVID-19, WaterAid is uniquely positioned to support the private sector to build long-term resilience through the implementation of business and people critical hygiene plans.

To discuss water, sanitation and hygiene management strategy and bespoke materials tailored to your company, **contact** [corporate@wateraid.org](mailto:corporate@wateraid.org)