

WASH Fact Sheet

AUSTRALIAN
WATER

ASSOCIATION

Prepared by the Australian Water Association WASH Specialist Network Committee

What is WASH?

Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) is built on the premise that access to safe water, adequate sanitation and hygiene can have far reaching benefits including improving health outcomes, reducing illness and preventable deaths, reducing poverty, increasing school attendance and contributing to gender equality outcomes.

Why WASH?

Global context

WASH has been a significant issue in Asia, sub-saharan Africa and a range of other countries, particularly developing countries in tropical locations of the world.

Sanitation

40% of the world's population – that is 2.5 billion people – practice open defecation or lack adequate sanitation facilities.¹

More people in the world have a mobile phone than a toilet.²

Water

1 in 10 people in the world lack access to safe water – that is 663 million people.

Hygiene

It has been estimated that hand washing alone has the potential to cut the risk of diarrhoea disease associated deaths almost in half which could save hundreds of lives every day.³

Human Rights

On 28 July 2010, the United Nations General Assembly recognised the human right to water and sanitation by acknowledging that clean drinking water and sanitation are essential to the realisation of human rights.

WASH and public health

WASH and public health are inexorably linked. The source of many health issues relates to unsafe water, poor sanitation and hygiene practices. It is for this reason that WASH has significant potential to contribute to better public health outcomes.

WASH and waterborne diseases

Waterborne diseases are pathogens that are transmitted via contaminated water. Poor sanitation and hygiene practices may also contribute to water borne diseases and be the cause of disease in their own right. Most waterborne diseases cause diarrhoea. Other waterborne diseases can cause malnutrition, skin infections and organ damage.

¹ Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation - <http://www.gatesfoundation.org/What-We-Do/Global-Development/Water-Sanitation-and-Hygiene> accessed 16 February 2016.

² Global Water Crisis: Water and Sanitation Facts - <http://water.org/water-crisis/water-sanitation-facts/> accessed 16 February 2016.

³ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention - http://www.cdc.gov/healthywater/hygiene/fast_facts.html accessed 16 February 2016.

Diarrhoea

Diarrhoea is a major public health issue with an estimated 1.8 million people dying from diarrhoea every year with 90% of these people being children under 5 years of age.⁴

With an extraordinary 88% of diarrhoea disease attributed to unsafe water supply, inadequate sanitation and poor hygiene, it is evident that hand washing, improved sanitation and improved water supply can all contribute significantly to diarrhoea disease including diarrhoea morbidity.

Schistosomiasis

Globally it is estimated that 160 million people are infected with *schistosomiasis*. The disease causes tens of thousands of deaths every year, mainly in sub-Saharan Africa.

The disease is strongly related to unsanitary excreta disposal and unsafe water sources.

Trachoma

Globally, 6 million people are visually impaired by trachoma. Trachoma is strongly related to the absence of safe water and poor hygiene practices.

Intestinal helminths (Ascariasis, Trichuriasis, Hookworm)

Intestinal helminths infections can cause cognitive impairment, dysentery and anaemia and can be largely attributed to sanitary and hygiene practices. These diseases cause over 9000 deaths globally every year.

Japanese encephalitis

Japanese encephalitis can cause permanent brain damage and death. Improved water management may reduce the likelihood of transmission of the disease.

Arsenic

Arsenic levels in water can cause significant health issues including skin lesions. Elevated levels of arsenic in drinking water are a major challenge for WASH practitioners.

Fluorosis

Elevated levels of fluoride in drinking water can lead to dental fluorosis and skeletal fluorosis. Fluorosis is considered to be a significant issue in China.

WASH and vector-borne diseases

A natural or man-made change to water can increase exposure to vector-borne diseases. For example, an increase in water from flooding can directly increase the number of mosquitoes and other insects, thus creating higher risks for disease.

Some vector borne diseases include malaria, dengue fever and West Nile encephalitis.

Globally over 1 million people die each year from mosquito-borne diseases with many of these being young children in sub-Saharan Africa.⁵

WASH and malaria

Malaria is a vector borne disease. 1.3 million people die of malaria each year, 90% of whom are children under 5 years of age. Better management of water resources can reduce transmission of malaria and other vector-borne diseases.

⁴ Water, sanitation and hygiene links to health - World Health Organisation, http://www.who.int/water_sanitation_health/facts2004/en/ accessed 20 February 2016.

⁵ Global WASH related diseases and contaminants - Centers for Disease Control and Prevention http://www.cdc.gov/healthywater/wash_diseases.html accessed 20 February 2016.

WASH and nutrition

A lack of nourishment and nutrition can lower a person's resistance to infection and disease, and increase the risk of people dying from diarrhoea diseases and respiratory infections. A lack of nutrition in early childhood can result in a reduced growth rate causing stunting. Children are especially vulnerable to intestinal diseases which can be caused by poor water and sanitation.

Having access to WASH to prevent diarrhoea has been linked to being a key factor in enabling people to have access to adequate nutrition.

WASH and disaster management

Damage and disruption to essential infrastructure and services including water, sanitation and shelter, often occurs as a result of disasters such as cyclones, floods, storms, earthquakes, tsunamis, etc.

The risk of disease outbreak including diarrhoea diseases can escalate in the initial stages following a disaster.

International aid agencies put a lot of importance on WASH programs in the initial phases of response to disasters to put in place interventions that help provide temporary relief from disrupted supplies including provision of emergency water supplies, emergency sanitation facilities, water treatment and good hygiene practices and hygiene promotion initiatives.

WASH in schools

There are a range of initiatives and campaigns that have promoted and supported WASH programs in schools. A timeline of events is detailed below:

2010: *'Call to action WASH in schools campaign'* launched.

2011: A *'WASH in Schools Framework for action'* was developed and agreed.

2015: Mapping exercise of WASH in schools undertaken.

2015: Debate led by UNICEF to improve WASH in schools led to a renewed call to action.

It is critical that children have access to WASH services in schools, particularly the needs of girls to help ensure absenteeism does not become a problem.

WASH and gender

The need to incorporate gender equality and gender equity in WASH is critical, not least for the following reasons:

- Women and girls are often the primary users, providers, collectors and managers of water in their households
- Women and girls often benefit the most when WASH services are improved
- WASH initiatives can impact positively on social, political and economic positions of those involved; this includes women.
- A gendered approach can enhance cooperation and understanding between genders and reduce the risk of marginalising the views and preferences of women and girls.
- Women have menstrual hygiene needs that need to be considered and catered for.

WASH and disabilities

People living with disabilities represent a large socially excluded group with many living in low socio-economic demographics without access to basic sanitary services. This lack of access to basic sanitary services can exacerbate physical and mental impairments and levels of poverty. WASH has a critical role to ensure that services cater for people with disabilities.

Tools and approaches in WASH

Many tools and approaches have evolved to support WASH programs, with most of these having a focus on changing people's behaviour. To achieve this, many WASH programs incorporate behaviour change drivers such as status, disgust, nurture or privacy.

Generally hygiene promotion approaches are based on participatory community-based approaches and marketing approaches.

Participatory community based approaches aim to create a sense of responsibility and place decision making at community level. Participatory community based approaches include:

- SARAR (Self-esteem, Associate strength, Resourcefulness, Action planning, Responsibility)
- PRA (Participatory Rural Appraisal)
- PHAST (Participatory Hygiene and Sanitation Transformation)
- CLTS (Community-led Total Sanitation)
- CHCs (Community Health Clubs)
- CtC (Child to Child approach)

Marketing approaches aim to stimulate demand and have consideration for product, price, place and promotion. Marketing approaches include:

- Saniya (a hygiene communication campaign)
- PPPHWS (Public Private Partnership for Hand Washing with Soap)
- TSSM (Total Sanitation and Sanitation Marketing)⁶

More information

Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation

<http://www.gatesfoundation.org/What-We-Do/Global-Development/Water-Sanitation-and-Hygiene>

Global WASH related diseases and contaminants - Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

http://www.cdc.gov/healthywater/wash_diseases.html

Global Water Crises: Water and sanitation facts

<http://water.org/water-crisis/water-sanitation-facts/>

Sanitation and hygiene approaches - WaterAid

www.wateraid.org/technologies

UNHCR - Water, sanitation and hygiene

<http://www.unhcr.org/pages/49c3646cef.html>

WASH in schools

<http://www.washinschools.info/page/107>

World Health Organisation - Water, sanitation and hygiene links to health

http://www.who.int/water_sanitation_health/facts2004/en/

⁶ Sanitation and hygiene approaches - WaterAid www.wateraid.org/technologies accessed 22 February 2016.