

Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene in Health Facilities

A Hidden Crisis in Low and Middle Income Countries

Most healthcare facilities in low and middle income countries have poor access to safe water, toilets, and places to wash hands.

A study by the University of North Carolina found that only 41% of healthcare facilities in low and middle income countries had a water supply within 500 meters. Only 65% of healthcare facilities had water and soap available for handwashing, and 81% lacked toilets. This translates to millions of health workers and patients with no access to safe water.

In these circumstances, health workers cannot wash their hands or safely administer oral medicines to their patients. According to some estimates, healthcare facility-acquired infections are 2 to 20 times more common in developing countries.



A labor and delivery room in a healthcare facility in Zambia

Global Response

In response to this crisis, the World Health Organization and UNICEF launched a global action plan in 2015 with the goal of ensuring that all healthcare facilities in all settings have adequate water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) services by 2030. This target is included in the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goal Number 6: Ensure access to water and sanitation for all. There is a lot of work to do to meet this goal.

Taking Action

Improving WASH in healthcare facilities in low and middle income countries starts with increasing access to basic WASH services, such as handwashing, toilets, and safe drinking water. In the short term, healthcare facilities can install low cost, portable handwashing and drinking water stations and medical waste bins in every room or ward where patient care takes place. In the longer term, facilities can install water supply infrastructure, latrines or toilets, and medical waste incinerators.

Short-term Interventions

- Portable handwashing stations
- Portable drinking water stations
- Medical waste bins



Long-term Interventions

- Permanent water supply infrastructure, such as rainwater collection tanks and boreholes with elevated tanks
- Latrines and toilets
- Medical waste incinerators



What Can Rotary Chapters Do?

- Partner with local ministries of health, United Nations agencies, non-governmental organizations, and private companies to **adopt a single healthcare facility or all facilities in a district in need.**
- Commit to installing short- or long-term WASH and waste management interventions in health posts, health centers, or hospitals, as part of the adoption.
- Help local partners spread the word about the need for improved WASH in healthcare facilities in low and middle income countries and encourage the participation of local ministries of health and water.



Felker Ward and Blaine Kelly of the Atlanta Rotary Club join with local villagers in eastern Kenya to dedicate a donated borehole and hand pump.

More Information

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC) global WASH program is committed to saving lives and reducing illness by improving global access to healthy and safe water, adequate sanitation, and improved hygiene. For more information on CDC's global WASH work and focus areas, visit www.cdc.gov/healthywater/global. Please e-mail healthywater@cdc.gov for questions or suggestions on how to get involved.



**Centers for Disease
Control and Prevention**
National Center for Emerging
and Zoonotic Infectious Diseases