

JOINT STATEMENT

“To control COVID-19, we have to make hand hygiene accessible to all” – UNICEF and WHO

Joint statement by Henrietta Fore, Executive Director of UNICEF, and Dr. Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, Director-General of the World Health Organization, on the launch of the ‘Hand Hygiene for All’ joint initiative

New York/Geneva, 26 June 2020 – “As the world struggles to cope with a new disease, one of the most effective tools to prevent its spread is also one of the most basic. Hand hygiene has never been more critical, not only to combat COVID-19, but to prevent a range of other infections. Yet, nearly six months since the onset of the pandemic, the most vulnerable communities around the world continue to lack access to basic hand hygiene.

“According to our latest data, the majority of people in the least developed countries are at immediate risk of COVID-19 infection due to a lack of hand hygiene facilities. In the 60 highest-risk countries, 2 out of 3 people – 1 billion people in total – lack basic handwashing facilities with soap and water at home. Around half are children.

“All too often, schools, clinics, hospitals and other public spaces also lack hand hygiene facilities, putting children, teachers, patients and health workers at risk. Globally, 2 in 5 health care facilities do not have hand hygiene at points of care.

“We cannot overstate the threat.

“Many of the those who lack access to basic handwashing live in overcrowded, desperately poor conditions. Even before the pandemic, children and families faced barriers to accessing health and hygiene services. Now the grave risk of COVID-19 threatens further suffering and spread of this deadly disease.

“If we are going to control COVID-19, we have to make hand hygiene accessible to all. That is why we are launching a new global initiative to move the world towards the same goal: supporting the most vulnerable communities with the means to protect their health and environment.

“We are joining our efforts with those of other international partners, national governments, public and private sectors, and civil society organizations to ensure affordable products and services are available, especially in disadvantaged areas, and to enable a culture of hygiene.

“Public health response plans and reopening plans should couple physical distancing and other control measures with hand hygiene and access to safe water and sanitation, and must reach the most vulnerable communities.

“Our teams are developing comprehensive country roadmaps and committing human and financial resources to support global and local implementation efforts. Task teams will facilitate learning and knowledge exchange, while multisector stakeholders will strengthen hygiene programming and monitor global progress. Leaders and community mobilizers will advise on

strategies and advocate for their implementation. Only together can we achieve universal hand hygiene.

“We must also ramp up investment in hygiene, water and sanitation, and in infection prevention and control. We urge countries to scale up, systemize and institutionalize hand hygiene and commit to strengthening the enabling environment, supply vital products and services, and to actively promote hygiene practices as part of a package of actions that save lives.

“The COVID-19 pandemic has exposed an uncomfortable truth: too many people around the world simply cannot clean their hands. But we can help to reduce the spread, and we can prevent future infectious diseases from following a similar path. It starts by making sure everyone, everywhere has access to basic hand hygiene facilities with soap and clean water or alcohol-based products in homes, schools and health care facilities.”

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Note to editors:

Source for data:

WHO/UNICEF Joint Monitoring Programme for Water Supply, Sanitation, and Hygiene 2020 (washdata.org).

- These statistics are based on the latest available internationally comparable estimates for drinking water, sanitation, and hygiene (2017)

Source for high-risk countries:

The [INFORM COVID-19 Risk Index](#) identifies countries at risk of health and humanitarian impacts of COVID-19 overwhelming national response capacity and requiring humanitarian assistance. The index combines information on hazards and exposure, vulnerability and coping capacity and categorizes 60 countries as either ‘high’ or ‘very high risk’.

About UNICEF

UNICEF works in some of the world’s toughest places, to reach the world’s most disadvantaged children. Across more than 190 countries and territories, we work for every child, everywhere, to build a better world for everyone.

For more information about UNICEF and its work for children visit www.unicef.org.

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About WHO

The World Health Organization directs and coordinates international health within the United Nations system. Working with its 194 Member States, WHO’s mission is to promote health, keep the world safe and serve the vulnerable. For more information about WHO, visit www.who.int. Follow WHO on [Twitter](#) and [Facebook](#)

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