



# Water, sanitation, hygiene and health

A PRIMER FOR  
HEALTH PROFESSIONALS



World Health  
Organization





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# Why this primer?

Safe water, sanitation and hygiene (collectively known as WASH) are crucial for human health and well-being. Yet, millions of people globally lack adequate WASH services and consequently suffer from or are exposed to a multitude of preventable illnesses. Lack of safe WASH negatively impacts quality of life and undermines fundamental human rights. Poor WASH services also weaken health systems, threaten health security and place a heavy strain on economies.

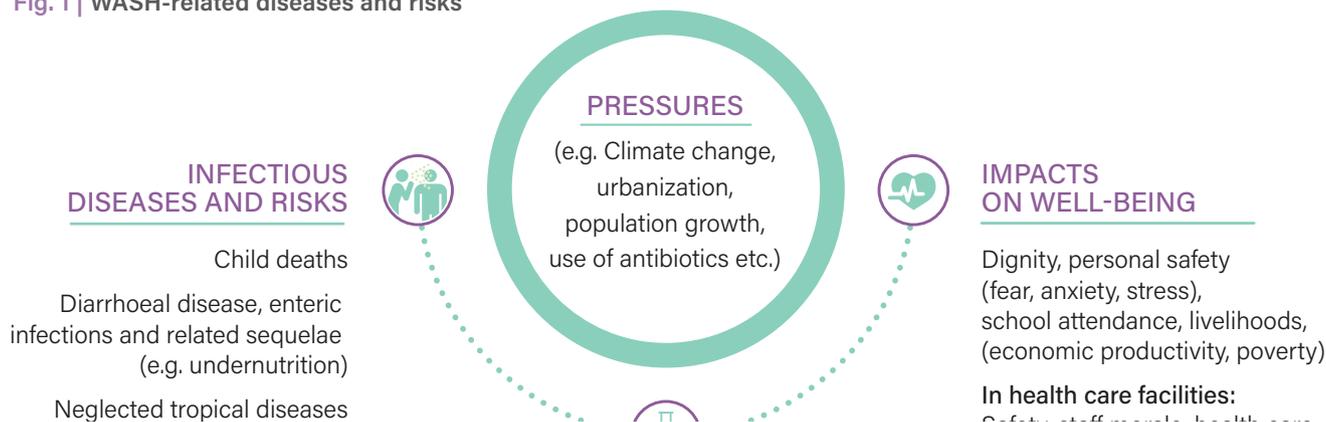
So, what can health professionals do to maximize positive impacts from WASH interventions? This primer aims to guide health professionals on engaging with WASH-related issues. It gives an overview of WASH interventions and the status of WASH services globally and outlines key linkages with health. It provides examples of key actions that health actors can take to ensure WASH efforts effectively protect public health and highlights World Health Organization (WHO) activities to support those actions.

# WASH-related burden – key facts

## WASH-RELATED HEALTH BURDEN

WASH-related diseases and risks are wide ranging (Fig. 1). They include infections transmitted by the faecal-oral route, health impacts from exposures to chemicals and other contaminants in drinking-water, as well as impacts on well-being. WASH-related diseases and risks can be exacerbated by a number of factors including climate change, population growth, rapid urbanization or, in the case of antimicrobial resistance, antibiotic use.

Fig. 1 | WASH-related diseases and risks



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