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# Water and Sanitation for Health Facility Improvement Tool (WASH FIT)

A practical guide for improving quality of care through water,  
sanitation and hygiene in health care facilities



WASH FOR  
HEALTH

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# Contents

<b>Foreword</b>	v
<b>Acknowledgements</b>	vi
<b>Abbreviations and acronyms</b>	vii
<b>1. Introduction</b>	1
Why focus on WASH in health care facilities?	1
<b>2. Overview of WASH FIT</b>	3
Why use WASH FIT?	3
Who should use WASH FIT?	4
What areas of a facility does WASH FIT cover?	4
In what type of facilities should WASH FIT be used?	5
How can WASH FIT be adapted for other types of facilities and settings?	5
What role does leadership play in WASH FIT	6
<b>3. The WASH FIT process</b>	7
Task 1: Assemble a WASH FIT team and hold regular meetings.	9
Task 2: Conduct an assessment of the facility.	13
Task 3: Undertake hazard and risk assessment.	18
Task 4: Develop an improvement plan.	24
Task 5: Monitor the progress of the improvement plan and make revisions as necessary	26
<b>4. References</b>	28
<b>5. Tool templates</b>	31
Tool 1A: WASH FIT team list.	32
Tool 1B: WASH FIT team meeting record sheet.	33
Tool 2A: Indicators assessment	35
Tool 2B: Record of assessment	53
Tool 2C: Sanitary inspection forms	55
Sanitary inspection form 1: Dug well with hand pump.	55
Sanitary inspection form 2: Deep borehole with motorized pump	57
Sanitary inspection form 3: Public/yard taps and piped distribution.	58
Sanitary inspection form 4: Rainwater harvesting	60
Sanitary inspection form 5: Storage reservoirs.	61
Tool 3: Risk assessment.	63
Tool 4: Improvement plan.	67
<b>Annex 1: Guidance for national or district level implementers and policymakers</b>	69
WASH FIT external follow-up visit questionnaire	72
Activity planning example	77
<b>Annex 2: Contributors</b>	78





Nurse at primary health care centre,  
Ségou, Mali.

# Foreword

World leaders recently declared that universal health coverage (UHC) and access to high quality, integrated “people centred” health services, are essential to health for all and to human security.<sup>1</sup> Yet, efforts to accelerate UHC and quality of care will be undermined because fundamental infrastructure and hygiene in health facilities are not in place. A WHO/UNICEF 2015 global review reported that nearly 40% of facilities lack water supplies, 19% are without sanitation and 35% do not have any hand hygiene materials.<sup>2</sup> Indeed, UHC may be an empty promise without adequate attention to quality, and quality initiatives will fail without adequate attention to water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH).

The lack of WASH services compromises the ability to provide safe and quality care, places both health care providers and those seeking care at substantial risk of infection-related morbidities and mortality, and poses a significant economic and social burden. Pregnant women, who are increasingly giving birth in health care facilities, and their newborns, are especially vulnerable to the consequences of poor WASH services. Among hospital-born babies in developing countries, health care associated infections are responsible for between 4% and 56% of all causes of death in the neonatal period, 75% of which occur in South-East Asia and sub-Saharan Africa.<sup>3</sup>

To address this major gap in services, in 2015, WHO and UNICEF (along with health and WASH partners from across the globe) committed to the vision, that by 2030, every health care facility, in every setting, should have safely managed, reliable water, sanitation and hygiene facilities and practices that meet staff and patient needs.<sup>4</sup> One output from this commitment has been the development of WASH FIT.

WASH FIT is a risk-based approach for improving and sustaining water, sanitation and hygiene and health care waste management infrastructure and services in health care facilities in low- and middle-income countries (LMIC). WASH FIT is an improvement tool to be used on a continuous and regular basis, to first and foremost help health care facility staff and administrators prioritize and improve services, and, second, to inform broader district, regional and national efforts to improve quality health care.

The WASH FIT guide contains practical step-by-step directions and tools for assessing and improving services. It is adapted from the water safety plan (WSP) approach recommended in the WHO *Guidelines for drinking-water quality* (WHO, 2011) and goes beyond water safety to include sanitation and hygiene, health care waste, management and staff empowerment.

WASH FIT provides an opportunity to improve WASH through a health lens. Improving WASH in health care facilities helps reduce maternal and newborn mortality and improves the quality of care so that women can deliver with dignity, further benefiting holistic health aims. Emerging and growing threats from antimicrobial resistant infections and infectious disease outbreaks can also be significantly reduced by improving WASH services. Country piloting and implementation of WASH FIT have focused on the above and evidence is emerging on how WASH FIT can strengthen, especially at the facility level, services in countries such as Cambodia, Chad, Ethiopia, Liberia and Mali.

Long-term facility improvements require national-level commitment and leadership from both WASH and health actors. WASH infrastructure and service improvements ought to be prioritized, budgeted and implemented as part of wider health systems strengthening efforts and supported with appropriate national policies and standards. Multisectoral collaborations prior to, during and following the WASH FIT implementation are especially important for implementing and institutionalizing WASH practices in health care facilities and beyond.

There is a free digital version of WASH FIT which uses the mWater digital monitoring platform to help perform assessments, track hazards and improvement actions and visualize progress over time. To use WASH FIT Digital visit <https://washfit.org/#/> or the Google Play store.

<sup>1</sup> World Bank, WHO, UNICEF, JICA and UHC 2030 International Health Partnership (2017). Tokyo Declaration on Universal Health Coverage. December 2017. [http://www.who.int/universal\\_health\\_coverage/tokyo-declaration-uhc.pdf?ua=1](http://www.who.int/universal_health_coverage/tokyo-declaration-uhc.pdf?ua=1)

<sup>2</sup> WHO/UNICEF (2015). Water, sanitation and hygiene in health care facilities: Urgent needs and actions. Meeting report. [http://www.who.int/entity/water\\_sanitation\\_health/facilities/wash-in-hcf-geneva.pdf?ua=1](http://www.who.int/entity/water_sanitation_health/facilities/wash-in-hcf-geneva.pdf?ua=1)

<sup>3</sup> WHO. Health care associated infections. Fact sheet. [http://www.who.int/gpsc/country\\_work/gpsc\\_ccisc\\_fact\\_sheet\\_en.pdf?ua=1](http://www.who.int/gpsc/country_work/gpsc_ccisc_fact_sheet_en.pdf?ua=1)

<sup>4</sup> For more information on the global action plan, visit [www.washinhcf.org](http://www.washinhcf.org)

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