

Report reveals alarming lack of water, sanitation and hygiene in health care facilities

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The World Health Organization and UNICEF have commissioned the first comprehensive, multi-country analysis on water, sanitation and hygiene (WaSH) services in health care facilities, calling for global action to push toward 100 percent coverage of these services through new policies, collaboration, monitoring and training.

The report, released March 17, evaluated available WaSH data from 66,101 health-care facilities in 54 low- and middle-income countries and found that 38 percent of those facilities lack an improved [water](#) source, 19 percent lack improved sanitation, and 35 percent lack soap for hand washing - situations that impede even basic health-care services such as child delivery.

The report's authors are Jamie Bartram, director of The Water Institute at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and Don and Jennifer Holzworth Distinguished Professor in the department of environmental sciences and engineering, and Ryan Cronk, doctoral student in environmental sciences and engineering.

"It is shameful that there are health care facilities failing to provide a safe environment, compromising the health of those who turn to them for care," Bartram said. "We need health-care professionals—from the [health worker](#) in charge of the smallest health post to the CEO of the most sophisticated hospital—to take responsibility for delivering on the

medical maxim 'first do no harm.'"

Lack of water, sanitation and hygiene services in [health-care facilities](#) causes infection risk within the very institutions to which patients have come to expect healing. Without WaSH services, patients are put at risk of infection unnecessarily and often have to exit the facility to obtain a drink of water or to relieve themselves. Furthermore, staff members lose an important opportunity to demonstrate safe sanitation and hygiene practices that can improve community habits and health.

Improvements to services can and should begin immediately, the report said, and will require leadership from the [health](#) sector, technical advice from water and sanitation experts, and political commitment from governments.

More information: The report is available online at www.who.int/water_sanitation_health/en

Provided by University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

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