

Water, Sanitation & Hygiene

Providing adequate water, sanitation and hygiene services is a key public health challenge in today's world.

Around 2.2 billion people worldwide lack access to safe drinking water, and 3 billion lack access to improved sanitation, leading to 1.7 billion cases of diarrheal disease each year. Even though diarrheal diseases are preventable and treatable, more than 760,000 children under age 5 die from these diseases annually.

Because safe water, improved sanitation and maintaining good hygiene are crucial to human health, well-being, dignity and development, International Medical Corps works to provide these most basic human needs, no matter how challenging the conditions. This is why we prioritize the prevention of diseases related to water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) as part of our comprehensive approach to health.





By 2025, half of the global population will live in water-stressed regions.

Children who are malnourished and individuals with impaired immunity—such as people living with HIV/AIDS—are more susceptible to life-threatening diarrhea. WASH-related diseases account for half of hospital-bed occupancy in developing countries, increasing the burden on healthcare systems that are often overstretched. Furthermore, one in four health facilities has no water services, and one in 10 has no sanitation services.

With decades of experience in emergency response, International Medical Corps implements WASH interventions at healthcare facilities, communities, camps and schools, in both emergency and development contexts. We work with local leaders to provide adequate, safe, potable drinking water; improve sanitation infrastructure; promote personal and domestic hygiene; and improve infection prevention and control (IPC) measures in health facilities.



WATER SUPPLY

In line with international and national standards, International Medical Corps works to provide communities with adequate safe water for drinking, cooking and personal and domestic hygiene. We ensure that communal water points are sufficiently close to dwellings to meet minimum requirements.

SANITATION

International Medical Corps works with communities to build gender-segregated sanitation facilities that are safe and accessible both day and night. True to our mission of

working closely with those most affected by disasters, we help communities and relevant authorities develop and implement sustainable WASH programs. Our community-centered approach helps residents improve sanitation during emergency recovery and development.

HYGIENE PROMOTION

International Medical Corps teaches people of all ages the personal, domestic, environmental and food hygiene practices that prevent or mitigate transmission of disease. All social and behavioral change information and education and communication programs are designed in consultation with the local community, ministries of health and the Global WASH Cluster and are culturally appropriate.

WASH IN HEALTH FACILITIES

To ensure smooth healthcare delivery, International Medical Corps trains health facility staff in IPC measures and the appropriate disposal of hazardous medical waste, to prevent cross-infection and halt the spread of hospital-acquired infections, including COVID-19. Our key focus is building the capacity needed to enable the local community to respond to future emergencies.

COVID-19 RESPONSE

During the COVID-19 pandemic, International Medical Corps has instituted IPC measures that fully meet WASH standards and ensure the safety of our staff, patients and health facility visitors. Moreover, we have implemented risk communication and community engagement strategies to promote behaviors that reduce the spread of disease.



During active emergencies, International Medical Corps supports lifesaving WASH interventions within communities and at institutional

facilities. In addition to responding to emergency needs, we also work to address chronic water scarcity and sanitation challenges in countries around the world, including the examples below.

AFGHANISTAN

International Medical Corps addresses critical, lifesaving WASH needs and gaps through our community health programs. Using green energy, we provide water supply services to the most vulnerable and deprived communities by constructing water points and rehabilitating community water systems. We also truck clean water to returnee camps and other vulnerable populations in hard-to-reach areas. In a country where just over one-quarter of the population has access to improved sanitation facilities, we operate a community-led total sanitation (CLTS) program to end open defecation through behavior-change strategies and by empowering people to spread knowledge to their peers. We also encourage the formation of family health action groups, which work with community health workers to foster behavioral change around sanitation and hygiene at the household level.

Our WASH teams also work closely with Afghan communities to raise awareness and promote a culture of handwashing by distributing hygiene kits to thousands of people and providing handwashing stations with soap to health facilities and vulnerable communities.

DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO (DRC)

International Medical Corps has a long history of rebuilding and strengthening the DRC's health system in the wake of various crises, including multiple outbreaks of the Ebola virus. When the DRC experienced an outbreak in 2018, we built Ebola treatment centers and screening-and-referral units (SRUs) to monitor populations in affected areas. We rehabilitated waste zones and latrines in the health facilities we support, and installed rainwater-collection systems with reservoirs to provide water for clinical and patient needs. Our WASH team also upgraded an Ebola Treatment Center in Makeke to a primary health facility featuring a pediatric ward, maternity ward, wards for men and women, a waste management zone and staff quarters. In response to both Ebola and COVID-19, we have provided healthcare workers with IPC training and thousands of WASH and IPC supply kits.

ETHIOPIA

International Medical Corps has built WASH infrastructure in health centers, camps and communities, supporting the installation of roof-based rainwater-harvesting systems, water storage containers and water purification materials for households and health posts, and rehabilitating local water sources. We work in three camps housing Somali refugees,



improving access to sanitation and hygiene facilities for thousands. Through mass awareness campaigns and home visits, we educate refugees on handwashing, hygienic latrine usage, safe-water chains and solid-waste disposal. We also train health workers and community volunteers on a variety of WASH-related topics.

NIGERIA

To improve WASH access for people affected by continued conflict in northeast Nigeria, we lead the WASH Cluster in the local government area (LGA) of Damboa, which contains six camps for internally displaced persons (IDPs). We provide clean water to these IDP camps via water trucking and by drilling boreholes that we fit with solar-powered or hand-operated pumps. We also distribute handwashing stations, soap and disinfectant to thousands of households to prevent the spread of COVID-19.



International Medical Corps carries out WASH projects in communities, refugee camps, schools and health facilities. We work throughout the emergency relief, recovery and development phases, responding

to natural disasters, public health emergencies and mass population movements that result from conflict and other complex emergencies. Across our programs, we help communities and relevant authorities develop and implement sustainable WASH interventions.

SOMALIA

In response to drought, conflict and floods, International Medical Corps has rehabilitated solar-powered wells, water points and water supply systems, and installed hand pumps, to provide increased community access to safe drinking water and ensure uninterrupted water supplies at health facilities. We have established WASH committees that make sure water quality meets minimum WHO standards, and that undertake the routine operation and maintenance of the water supply infrastructure. We have also rehabilitated laundries and installed incinerators, ash sharp pits and handwashing stations at health facility waste zones. In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, our community health promoters have scaled up hygiene promotion and infection-prevention activities in camps and host communities.

SUDAN (DARFUR REGION)

International Medical Corps operates in around 90 health facilities in West, Central, South Darfur, Blue Nile and South Kordofan states, running solid-waste management campaigns in camps and local communities, providing safe drinking water and improving water infrastructure in health facilities by installing water tanks that increase capacity and enable a consistent supply. Through health and nutrition education, we empower vulnerable groups to lead their own hygiene promotion activities.

YEMEN

In a country where 80% of the population requires humanitarian assistance, we have rehabilitated community water supply systems and installed solar-powered submersible pumps. We've provided emergency water where needed and trucked treated water to IDP camps and health facilities. We monitor water quality and provide operational support to water management committees. Moreover, we have rehabilitated sanitation systems in major cities in Sana'a and Ibb governorates, installing emergency latrines in IDP camps and WASH infrastructure in the health facilities we support. We have conducted COVID-19 prevention training for health workers in our supported health facilities and distributed environmental health kits and WASH/IPC materials to treatment centers, health facilities and hospitals across the country.

ZIMBABWE

Since 2011, International Medical Corps has strengthened WASH capacities in five Mashonaland Central Province districts. Our community health clubs promote community and household hygiene improvements, including the construction of pot racks, handwashing facilities and latrines. In response to COVID-19, we've implemented WASH/IPC programs aimed at increasing IPC information at healthcare facilities and improving access to WASH services at isolation centers, and have trained around 500 staff at 17 healthcare facilities in IPC measures.

UKRAINE

Since the Russian invasion in February 2022, International Medical Corps has helped reestablish health systems in liberated areas of Chernihiv, Kharkiv, Kyiv and Zaporizhzhia by rehabilitating and providing safe, potable water to damaged health facilities. We have also provided safe drinking water and distributed WASH-related items, including IPC kits, to affected populations.

Through our work with the Ministry of Health and other government agencies, the WASH team set up a modular field hospital to replace a clinic in Kharkiv, and installed an emergency water distribution system at the Izium hospital within 72 hours of the liberation of that city. We continue to adapt our WASH interventions—including providing emergency WASH services to constrained and newly liberated areas, and rehabilitating WASH and health infrastructure—based on the changing context in Ukraine.



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A pre-eminent first responder since 1984, International Medical Corps delivers emergency medical and related services to those affected by conflict, disaster and disease, no matter where they are, no matter what the conditions. We also train people in their communities, providing them with the skills they need to recover, chart their own path to self-reliance and become effective first responders themselves.

December 2022

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