



# Global Burden of Unsafe Drinking Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene

**For Prelims:** [WASH](#) , [World Health Organization](#), [Sustainable Development Goals](#)

**For Mains:** Impacts of unsafe WASH practices, Concept of WASH and its importance for public health, Challenges and opportunities in achieving universal access to safe water and sanitation.

## Why in News?

According to a new report by the [World Health Organization \(WHO\)](#) titled "**Burden of Disease Attributable to Unsafe Drinking Water, Sanitation and Hygiene: 2019 Update**," unsafe [drinking water, sanitation, and hygiene \(WASH\)](#) practices have led to severe consequences, resulting in a significant loss of lives and widespread disease burden.

## What are the Impacts of Unsafe WASH Practices?

- **Mortality Toll:**
  - In 2019, unsafe WASH practices caused 395,000 deaths among children under the age of five.
  - **Breakdown of Deaths:**
    - 273,000 deaths were attributed to [diarrhoea](#).
    - 112,000 deaths were caused by acute respiratory infections.
  - **Inadequate access to WASH services** resulted in **at least 1.4 million deaths globally**.
- **Widespread Disease Impact:**
  - Diarrhoeal diseases accounted for over a million deaths and 55 million **Disability-adjusted life years (DALY)**.
    - DALY is the **sum of the number of years of life lost** due to **premature death and a weighted measure of the years lived** with disability due to a disease or injury.
  - An estimated 1.5 billion people worldwide are affected by [soil-transmitted helminthiases \(STH\)](#), transmitted through poor sanitation practices.
    - STH are transmitted by eggs in human faeces, which in turn contaminate soil in areas where sanitation is poor.
  - Inadequate WASH contributes to **10% of the disease burden** associated with [malnutrition](#).
- **Global Disparities in WASH Access:**
  - Currently, **771 million people lack access to safe water globally**.
  - Approximately 1.7 billion people do not have access to proper [sanitation facilities](#).
- **Consequences for Low and High-Income Countries:**
  - Poor hand hygiene practices led to around 384,000 diarrhoea-related deaths across all age groups in Africa and South-East Asia.
  - Even high-income countries, such as the **United States, experienced risks**, with 33,200 deaths from diarrhoeal diseases and 317,921 deaths from acute respiratory infections in

## What are Unsafe WASH Practices?

- **Drinking water** from contaminated or untreated sources, such as **polluted rivers or stagnant ponds**.
- Absence or **poor maintenance of toilets, latrines, or sewage systems** can result in the improper disposal of human waste.
- Insufficient handwashing with soap, improper food handling practices, and **lack of awareness about [basic hygiene](#)**.
- The practice of **[defecating in the open](#)**, without the use of a toilet or latrine contaminates the environment, water sources, and food.
- Inadequate **disposal of solid waste and improper handling of [hazardous waste](#)** can pollute water sources, contaminate soil, and create breeding grounds for disease-carrying vectors.

## What is WASH?

- **About:**
  - WASH is an acronym that **stands for the interrelated areas of Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene**.
  - The **[WHO WASH Strategy](#)** has been developed in response to Member State Resolution (WHA 64.4) and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.
  - It is a **component of WHO's 13<sup>th</sup> General Programme of Work 2019-2023** which aims to contribute to the health of three billion through multisectoral actions like better emergency preparedness and response; and one billion with **[Universal Health Coverage \(UHC\)](#)**.
  - It also takes on board the need for progressive realization of the human rights to safe drinking-water and sanitation, adopted by the **[UN General Assembly](#)** in July 2010.
- **Importance of Safe WASH:**
  - Access to **clean water, proper sanitation, and hygiene reduces the risk of illness, malnutrition, and mortality**.
  - Safe WASH facilities contribute to **[child and maternal health](#)**, ensuring safer childbirth practices and preventing child growth and development issues.
  - Gender-responsive WASH services **empower women and girls, promoting gender equality and dignity**.
  - Sustainable WASH practices protect **water resources, conserve the environment**, and mitigate **[climate change](#)** impacts.
  - Safe WASH is crucial for achieving the **[Sustainable Development Goals](#)** and creating healthier, more equitable communities.
- **Principles of the WHO WASH Strategy:**
  - Prioritize actions with **high public health benefits in WHO-relevant areas**.
  - Strengthen **health sector capacities for safe WASH** and outbreak response.
  - Align with SDGs on WASH, health, climate, nutrition, and human rights.
  - Utilize high-quality science and evidence for WASH norms and procedures.
  - Promote **incremental improvements in national WASH standards and targets**.
  - Capitalize on existing regional WASH policy frameworks and targets.
  - Stimulate sustainable change through stronger government institutions.
  - Engage partners to address health issues in the WASH sector, including healthcare facilities.
- **SDGs Linked to WASH:**
  - **Goal 3: Good Health and Well-being** - WASH is essential for preventing the spread of diseases and promoting good health.
  - **Goal 6: Clean Water and Sanitation** - This goal specifically addresses the need for access to clean drinking water and adequate sanitation facilities.
  - **Goal 12: Responsible Consumption and Production** - WASH is critical to ensure responsible consumption and production of water resources.
  - **Goal 13: Climate Action** - Climate change can impact access to safe drinking water, sanitation, and hygiene, making WASH an important component of climate action.

## UPSC Civil Services Examination Previous Year Question (PYQ)

**Q.** “To ensure effective implementation of policies addressing the water, sanitation and hygiene needs the identification of the beneficiary segments is to be synchronized with anticipated outcomes.” Examine the statement in the context of the WASH scheme. **(2017)**

**Source:** DTE

PDF Reference URL: <https://www.drishtiias.com/printpdf/global-burden-of-unsafe-drinking-water-sanitation-and-hygiene>

