



What your audience needs to know in an emergency: Life-saving information

Topic-by-topic guide to core humanitarian issues

INTRODUCTION

These guides are for media professionals working to help audiences affected by humanitarian crises. They give a brief overview of common humanitarian issues in emergencies. They will help you:

- Understand what kinds of problems your audiences are likely to be facing in emergencies
- Work alongside relief experts to provide audiences with accurate, relevant and life-saving information

HOW TO USE THESE GUIDES

These guides contain information on core humanitarian topics. They are intended as a starting point to help you identify the kinds of issues to address in your programmes and questions to ask relief experts. To help you identify which topics to prioritise, you should speak with local humanitarian specialists. If possible, speak with your audiences as well to find out what they need to know.

When using the guides remember to:

- Consider the local situation, culture and context to make sure the information is relevant
- Consider the specific needs of different audiences (for example, men, women, the most vulnerable people)
- Check for consistency with other sources of information being provided
- Consult qualified local specialists to check the validity and relevance of humanitarian information
- Use the guides in conjunction with BBC Media Action's Lifeline Production Manual, which contains guidelines on how to do effective programming in crises



WASH

Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH)

What is Wash?

WASH stands for Water, Sanitation and Hygiene. It covers topics relating to safe water, removal of waste (toilets and waste disposal) and health promotion.

Why is it important?

Safe water and sanitation are major priorities in emergency situations. Without adequate water and sanitation, communities can suffer disease and death. Poor hygiene practices put people at risk of diarrhoea, cholera, typhoid, malaria and other diseases.¹

How can media and communication help?

Many of the dangers and risks associated with WASH relate to personal behaviours and practices. It is helpful for audiences to understand some of the health risks, without scaring them, to motivate them to act. You can do this by sharing practical information with your audiences about how they can access safe water, avoid diseases and stay healthy.

Remember each emergency is different. Ask local aid experts to advise you on what information to prioritise and the best advice to share with your audience in the context.

¹See: UNICEF (2014); World Health Organization (2011).

What information can I share with audiences?

Your audiences may need answers to the following questions to help them take practical steps to stay safe and healthy. Get advice from local humanitarian specialists. Remember that there are different groups in the community with different needs. Find out which groups in the community are the most vulnerable (for example, children, pregnant women, elderly people etc.) and what advice to give them.

What are the current public health risks?

Common WASH-related health risks² include:

- 1 Consumption of water or food that has been contaminated through washing, cooking or the environment.
- 2 Transmission of diseases from hand to mouth when people do not wash.
- 3 Vectors (e.g. flies and mosquitoes) that breed near waste sites and stagnant water can spread diseases.

²Abdallah and Burnham (2008).



Remember public health risks may vary in different emergencies, so be sure to ask humanitarian specialists for up-to-date contextual information on risks and actions people should take.



What information can I share with audiences?



1 How can people protect themselves from the following risks?

Contaminated water

- Are the water sources contaminated or at risk of contamination? If they are, what can people do to access safe drinking water? Find out what options are available locally for accessing clean water (for example, using chlorine treatment, filtering and boiling, drinking bottled water, disinfecting with solar etc.) and give audiences clear **step-by-step** instructions on how to make water safe, for example how to use the purification tablets or what material to use to strain water etc.
- How should people transport and store water to ensure it is kept clean?
- Where can the community (if required) get access to water containers with lids, cooking utensils, soap, bathing facilities? How should they use them? What can people use in the absence of these items?
- (Where relevant) what provisions are available for drinking water for people's livestock?

2 Transmission of diseases from lack of hand-washing

What should people do with regard to:

- Washing hands after defecation and before food preparation? Standard advice is to wash hands thoroughly after using latrines and before touching food. Find out what options are available locally for hand-washing (for example, using ash, soap, other) and give audiences **step-by-step instructions** on what to do
- 3 Transmission of diseases through vectors (flies/mosquitoes)

What should people do with regard to:

 - Protection from mosquito-borne diseases? For example: avoid being outside when mosquitoes are most prevalent, take measures to prevent bites. Find out what protection options are available locally and give audiences instructions on their use (for example, mosquito nets or sheeting, chemical sprays)
 - Stopping vectors contacting food and water? For example: regularly wash storage pots and cover storage containers
 - Disposal of faeces? For example, don't defecate in open spaces or near water sources. Where necessary, build latrines (here you can provide audiences with **step-by-step** guidance from experts on building simple latrines, the importance of keeping latrines clean and filling unused latrines)

Case study



Many children in South Sudan were getting ill with severe diarrhoea due to food being contaminated by flies. The flies would land on faeces and then transfer the germs when they landed on food, which people would then eat. *Our Tukul*, a BBC Media Action radio magazine show for child and maternal health, interviewed a local mother about what she did to keep her child safe. The mother explained that she made sure the latrine was kept clean and also covered food to stop flies from landing on it. After the interview, a sanitation expert described simple actions the audience could do at home to prevent this kind of contamination.



Having a role model from the community was a way of helping listeners connect with the programme and feel motivated by hearing someone like them take simple effective actions. Following up her story with a qualified expert on the programme ensured listeners had credible, authoritative information from an expert on the subject.

The information in this document is based on the following sources:

Resources

IFRC step-by-step instructions on how to make water safe:

<http://www.ifrc.org/Global/Publications/disasters/142100-hwt-en.pdf>

UNICEF country site pages:

http://www.unicef.org/wash/index_43101.html

UNICEF WASH audio messages available to download in various languages:

<http://www.unicefec.org/category/index/water-sanitation-and-hygienewash>

WHO hygiene messages in post-disaster emergencies:

http://ec.europa.eu/echo/files/evaluation/watsan2005/annex_files/WHO/WHO14%20-%20Essential%20hygiene%20messages%20in%20post-disaster%20emergencies.pdf

OCHA infographics for potential use on publication material:

<http://www.unocha.org/top-stories/all-stories/ocha-launches-500-free-humanitarian-symbols>

CDAC message library: Generic WASH communication messages:

<http://www.cdacnetwork.org/tools-and-resources/message-library/>

Further reading

Abdallah, S. and Burnham, G. (2008). Water sanitation and hygiene in emergencies: Chapter 8 in: Public Health Guide for Emergencies, 2nd edn. Boston, MA: Johns Hopkins School of Hygiene and Public Health and International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies.

Available from: http://www.jhsph.edu/research/centers-and-institutes/center-for-refugee-and-disaster-response/publications_tools/publications/_CRDR_ICRC_Public_Health_Guide_Book/Chapter_8_Water_Sanitation_and_Hygiene_in_Emergencies.pdf

Oxfam (2012). Hygiene Promotion for HWTS in emergencies. Oxfam Technical Briefing Notes.

Available from: <http://policy-practice.oxfam.org.uk/publications/hygiene-promotion-for-household-water-treatment-and-safe-storage-in-emergencies-298978>

UNICEF (2014). Water Sanitation and Hygiene: Emergency WASH.

Available from: http://www.unicef.org/wash/index_emergency.html

UNICEF and USAID (1997). Towards Better Programming: A Sanitation Handbook. Water, Environment and Sanitation Technical Guidelines Series, No. 3. New York: UNICEF.

Available from: http://www.unicef.org/wash/files/San_e.pdf

World Health Organization (WHO) and United Kingdom Health Protection Agency and partners (2011). Water, sanitation and hygiene fact sheet. Disaster Risk Management for Health Fact Sheets.

Available from: http://www.who.int/hac/events/drm_fact_sheet_wash.pdf

WHO Regional Office for South-East Asia (prepared in Collaboration with RedR India) (2004). Rapid Needs Assessment for Water, Sanitation and Hygiene.

Available from: <http://www.chinacdc.cn/jkzt/tfggwssj/zzfb/kspg/200805/W020130201311913947020.pdf>