International Medical Corps

Water, Sanitation & Hygiene



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

About 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 them annually. One in four health facilities has no water services, and 10% lack sanitation services.

Most of the world's population lives with water insecurity, lacking consistent access to safe drinking water due to factors including climate change and poor water management. These factors further exacerbate water scarcity—which, coupled with other social problems like rising inequality and ethnic tensions, can cause conflict between communities.

Because safe water, improved sanitation and 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 people with impaired immunity are more susceptible to life-threatening diarrhea. WASH-related diseases account for half of the hospital-bed occupancy in developing countries, increasing the burden on healthcare systems that are often overstretched.

With decades of experience in emergency response, International Medical Corps implements WASH interventions at healthcare facilities, communities, camps and schools in emergency and development contexts. We work with local leaders to provide adequate safe and 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 households and that the facilities meet minimum requirements.

SANITATION

International Medical Corps works with communities to build gender-segregated sanitation facilities that are safe and accessible 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 educates people of all ages on the personal, domestic, environmental and food hygiene practices that prevent or mitigate disease transmission. All social- and behavioral-change information, 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

International Medical Corps ensures access to safe drinking water and sanitation infrastructure within health facilities to ensure smooth healthcare delivery. We train 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. Our key focus is on building the capacity of local communities to respond to future emergencies.

PUBLIC HEALTH RESPONSES

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

MPOX RESPONSE

To prevent the spread of mpox, our WASH team ensures access to safe drinking water and sanitation infrastructure, promotes hygiene in health facilities and implements other mpox-related IPC measures.

CLIMATE CHANGE

Our WASH team considers factors that exacerbate climate change and works to mitigate them. We offer innovative climate-adaptive programming that promotes water conservation, training for WASH governance on drinking water safety and security planning, and community training on sustainable resource harvesting.

International Medical Corps supports lifesaving WASH interventions within communities and at institutional facilities during active emergencies. In addition to responding to emergency needs, we work to address climate resilience, chronic water scarcity and sanitation challenges in countries worldwide, including the examples below.

AFGHANISTAN

International Medical Corps addresses critical WASH needs in vulnerable communities by providing water-supply services, promoting improved sanitation through community-led programs and behavior-change strategies, and forming family-health action groups to enhance household hygiene. Our WASH teams collaborate with Afghan communities to raise awareness, distribute hygiene kits and install handwashing stations in health facilities and vulnerable areas.

ETHIOPIA

International Medical Corps has built WASH infrastructure in health centers, camps and communities; supported the installation of roof-based rainwater harvesting systems, water storage containers and water purification materials for households and health posts; and rehabilitated 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 various WASH-focused themes.

GAZA

International Medical Corps integrates a robust WASH program into its emergency health services, providing essential WASH services—including safe drinking water, sanitation facilities and hygiene promotion—in the field hospitals we have operated since January 2024. Despite water salinity and security constraints, we have successfully implemented water-supply systems, including desalination plants, and maintained high water quality standards through continuous monitoring. Our WASH interventions also encompass solid and waste management, IPC and the distribution of hygiene kits, contributing to a safe and hygienic environment in the field hospitals.

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), and the WASH



Cluster in the Bakassi IDP camp in Maiduguri. We provide clean water to these IDP camps via water trucking and by drilling boreholes that we fit with solar-powered or hand pumps. We also distribute handwashing stations, soap and disinfectant to thousands of households to prevent the spread of disease.

PAKISTAN

Our WASH program, which is integrated with the health sector, enhances health outcomes by improving sanitation in health facilities and schools. International Medical Corps applies a holistic approach to community development while emphasizing community management of WASH infrastructure for sustainability. Collaborating with government departments, we rehabilitate non-functional water-supply schemes. Our rehabilitations of reverse-osmosis systems have provided safe drinking water to more than 15,000 people.

We carry 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, mass population movements resulting from conflict and other complex emergencies. Throughout our programs, we help communities and relevant authorities develop and implement sustainable WASH interventions.

SOMALIA

In response to drought, conflict and floods, we have rehabilitated solar-powered wells, water points and water-supply systems, and installed hand pumps to increase community access to safe drinking water and ensure uninterrupted water supplies at health facilities. We have established WASH committees that ensure that water quality meets minimum WHO standards and that undertake the routine operation and maintenance of water-supply infrastructure.

UKRAINE

International Medical Corps has been a critical player in Ukraine's emergency WASH response, addressing the severe infrastructure impacts of the ongoing conflict. Since the Russian invasion of February 2022, we have expanded our efforts to support WASH needs and broader infrastructure rehabilitation, particularly in health facilities crucial for millions of Ukrainians. Our comprehensive interventions include emergency water supply, sanitation services and the rehabilitation of WASH facilities in health centers to ensure IPC. Additionally, we have rehabilitated 85 health facilities by renovating bomb shelters, drilling wells and upgrading heating, electrical and ventilation systems—underscoring our commitment to sustaining healthcare delivery in challenging environments.

YEMEN

International Medical Corps has provided essential WASH services to more than 3 million Yemenis since 2012, addressing urgent needs in a country where 17.4 million people—about half the population—require humanitarian assistance. Our efforts include supplying clean water to nearly 800,000 people through system rehabilitation and solar-powered pumps, improving sanitation for more than 1 million people and promoting hygiene among more than 1 million others. Additionally, we focus on building climate resilience by working with local communities to establish sustainable WASH infrastructure that can withstand environmental challenges.





ZIMBABWE

Since 2011, International Medical Corps has strengthened WASH capacities in five districts of Mashonaland Central Province, Zimbabwe, where economic decline has reduced access to WASH services, leading to chronic outbreaks of diseases, including typhoid, dysentery and cholera. Our WASH team has rehabilitated, drilled and solarized boreholes, constructed latrines, improved WASH infrastructure in health facilities and schools, and trained workers in IPC, benefiting nearly 1.3 million people.

International Medical Corps

www.InternationalMedicalCorps.org

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.

September 2024

CONTACT INFO: **Syed Yasir Ahmad, Global WASH Advisor**
syahmad@internationalmedicalcorps.org.uk

International Medical Corps is headquartered in Los Angeles, CA, and has offices in Washington, DC; London, UK; and Split, Croatia.

For contact information, visit InternationalMedicalCorps.org/contact.