



# Guidance Note

## IPC in Schools during AWD/Cholera Outbreaks

### Acronyms

IPC	Infection Prevention Control
WASH	Water, Sanitation and Hygiene
AWD	Acute Watery Diarrhea
FRC	Free Residual Chlorine
RCCE	Risk Communication and Community Engagement
ORS	Oral Rehydration Salts
IEC	Information, Education and Communication

### Background and Challenges

WASH in schools during a cholera response is important due to the strong correlation between WASH and IPC. Not only can it impact the health and well-being of students and staff but also facilitate the potential spread of the disease via the congregation of children and adults from multiple households. Hygiene can often be more difficult to control with young children and therefore efforts to put in place systems to encourage good practices are essential.

To prevent the spread of cholera in schools, it is important to have clean and safe water sources, proper sanitation facilities, and good hygiene practices in place. This includes providing clean drinking water, hand-washing stations with soap, and education on hygiene and sanitation practices and implement Risk Communication and Community Engagement (RCCE) including dissemination of Information, Education and Communication materials (IEC).

Cholera/AWD is a serious concern in Syria due to the ongoing conflict and displacement of large numbers of people and the prolonged drought-like conditions, exacerbated by climate change. The breakdown of water and sanitation systems, overcrowding in shelters and camps, and limited access to clean water and proper sanitation facilities have all contributed to the spread of cholera in the country. Specific challenges in schools include damaged WASH facilities, disruptions to water supply, non-gender segregated WASH facilities, low levels of handwashing and non-harmonized WASH messaging. Infection Prevention Control (IPC) in schools refers to the measures taken to prevent and control the spread of communicable diseases in schools. This includes hand hygiene, cleaning and disinfection, health screening, vaccination, and communication. The goal of IPC in schools is to minimize the risk of infectious disease outbreaks in the school community and ensure a safe and healthy learning environment for students, teachers, and staff.

IPC in this document's context focuses on the provision of water and sanitation services, cleaning surfaces and hygiene practices, among others, that contribute to reducing risk of the spread of cholera and AWD and not health-based interventions such as screening and vaccination. WASH in schools covers a far wider umbrella of activities that are not considered within this document such as menstrual hygiene management, sanitation and water based on school storage capacities amongst many others.

This document sets out additional recommendations and guidelines for WASH and Education partners to follow regarding IPC in schools during active suspected cholera or AWD cases in a school's catchment area. It can be considered in addition to standard IPC and WASH guidelines and does not set out to supersede any existing standards that may exist for any particular

school. Many of the activities below are common standard practice without the presence of cholera, and in the event of an outbreak would be scaled up to account for the greater risk of infection present.

## PREPAREDNESS

In areas considered prone to AWD/cholera outbreaks, it is recommended to map the WASH conditions of existing schools as a baseline for future prioritization for interventions during an outbreak and to prioritize for regular preventative WASH interventions.

**RESPONSE** (Schools reporting cases or in communities reporting cases):

The priority objective of delivering a WASH/IPC in schools package during an outbreak is to sever the transmission chain and ensure that schools are safe environments for students to attend. The recommended scope of activities within this guidance is not the complete WASH in schools package implemented for mid- to long-term response but limited to essential life-saving aspects of IPC.

## EXIT STRATEGY

A more complete WASH in school package of activities can be eventually delivered, as a prevention/exit strategy in high-risk areas, when time and funds are available.

## Coordination

When planning to take IPC actions in schools it is necessary to coordinate effectively with any established education system local authorities, education partners acting in the same area, the WASH sector and the RCCE pillar for cholera. Ensure that the project is in line with larger national response plans and strategies of both education and WASH.

- Report cholera related IPC activities is possible through both sectors. WASH and education should be included in this reporting to ensure that coordinators can avoid duplication within the humanitarian response plan.
- Updating service mapping (health, nutrition, WASH facilities including clear water sources available in the community) and referral system and sharing with Education stakeholders
- Report cases in learning spaces to education authorities and the education sector, using a standard case definition when reporting on all suspected cases.
- Expansion and rehabilitation of WASH facilities in schools to be conducted in coordination with the WASH sector and education sector.
- Consult with local authorities on the status of school and learning modality when cases arise.
- Within each local operational context, it is important to define accountability of IPC in schools, especially between education and WASH sectors to ensure that no child is left behind.

## Harmonization

- Generation of standardized core messages, and quality standards for use in AWD/Cholera outbreaks.
- Explicitly include WASH in Schools within planning and operational documents setting out standards and guidelines that will be used or referenced. This allows for others new to the context or in different areas to easily pick up and implement standards rather than creating parallel systems.

## Planning and Exit Strategies

By creating strategies and having provisions in place that can be implemented and distributed quickly, outbreaks of cholera can remain small and localized. The fastest response is from local actors that act independently and immediately.

Response plans must be context specific, and considerations may include the following:

- Schedule refresher training for teachers in late winter and late summer (as cholera outbreaks expected in spring and autumn)
- Assigning responsibility for quality monitoring of WASH facilities, water safety and ensuring stocks, information, and methods in case of a cholera case

## Water Treatment

### Response activities

- Light repairs and rehabilitation of water facilities
- Disinfection of tanks
- Water quality monitoring
- Chlorination of water at school level, if needed
- Water supply as last resort in hotspots (schools reporting cases or in communities reporting cases) but with clear exit strategy and timeframe

### Recommendations

- When providing chlorine to schools, ensure that labels are clear and instructions provided to ensure good understanding of products' use.
- When water trucking services are in use, testing chlorination before filling tanks is recommended to avoid contamination of potable water.
- Stored water should be monitored weekly, and upon filling of tanks to ensure adequate chlorinated of 0.5-1 mg/L of free residual chlorine (FRC)
- Ensure water tanks are cleaned/disinfected and covered from the environment

## Hygiene Provision and Site Cleaning

### Response activities

- Provision of cleaning supply to school, especially for disinfection, for a period of 1 month
- Provision of soap, for a period of 1 month
- Light repairs of handwashing facilities
- Provision of hygiene kits to school-age children and to learning spaces

### Recommendations

- Ensure that handwashing facilities are in working order in the following areas as priority
  - At the exit to toilets and WASH Facilities
  - In Food preparation areas
  - At the entrances of canteens
- Provision of soap at handwashing stations is essential.
- Working toilet facilities that have easy to clean surfaces separated for girls and boys
- All WASH facilities are required to regularly cleaned and monitored a minimum of twice a day
- Ensure supply of soap at all handwashing facilities
- Bleach or chlorine solution should be used for surface cleaning in WASH facilities and food preparation areas with 0.2 % chlorine solution

## Sanitation

### Response activities

- Disinfection of sanitation facilitation
- Emergency desludging (once per school)
- Light repairs or rehabilitation of sanitation facilities
- Separation per gender in the cases that it is easy to implement without major works

### Recommendations

- Ensure that wastewater is discharged away from any drinking water sources
- Rehabilitation of on-site wastewater treatment is strongly encouraged as an exit strategy/longer intervention

## Risk Communication and Community Engagement (RCCE) Provisions

RCCE is a crucial component of WASH (Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene) in schools. The aim of RCCE is to ensure that the school community is informed and involved in the WASH activities. This involves creating awareness about the importance of WASH and the risks associated with poor WASH practices. It also involves encouraging the participation of students, teachers, and other stakeholders in the planning, implementation, and monitoring of WASH activities. Effective RCCE leads to better understanding, ownership, and sustainability of WASH programs in schools.

Hygiene Promotion for Children, Teachers and Janitorial Staff

Core Messaging should include:

### Hand Washing

Using soap and water

After use of WASH facilities

Before and after handling foods

After cleaning a child's bottom

After helping someone with symptoms

### Food Hygiene

Cleaning of food prep surfaces before and after cooking

Cleaning of food procedures

Cooking of foods including herbs

Caution using ice unless confident of the water source

Caution use of salad and raw herbs

## Information, Education and Communication (IEC)

Messaging and information material includes targeted messages to focus groups on social media, audio-video messaging for those video testimonies.

- Conduct a Knowledge, Attitude and Practice Study in the beginning of 2023 to calculate the impact of the information and awareness material/activities.
- Focused activities for children taking place in schools in the form edutainment
- Through community engagement, capture insights, opinions and perceptions of communities on their knowledge of cholera

## Capacity Building

Hygiene Promotion for Teachers and Janitorial Staff

- Overview on what cholera is and how it spreads
- Key locations and times for handwashing as laid out in RCCE Provisions
- Key changes in food preparation during cholera outbreaks as laid out in RCCE Provisions
- Chlorine Use, how to select the correct target concentration and mix effectively for cleaning, drinking and food cleaning
- Chlorine Storage, how to safely store chlorine products from potential health risks for staff and students
- Empowerment of teachers/janitors to take ownership of hygiene and water quality within school
- Understanding of the importance of segregated WASH facilities for girls in providing a safe space and therefore encourage use
- In event of a detected case of cholera within the school, reference of patients to health system, what actions to take to disinfect the area and minimize risk to other staff and students
- Include Cholera in your awareness sessions for school staff, children and community, PSS sessions and teacher training plans

- Capacity building could be extended to include health responses in conjunction with the health sector in immediate first in the event of sick staff member or student (such as ORS preparation)

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## Follow the Minimum Commitments for the WASH sector

The five core minimum commitments to the WASH sector are:

**ASSESSMENT:** Consult separately girls, boys, women, and men, including older people and those with disabilities, to ensure that WASH programs are designed to provide equitable access and reduce incidences of violence

**DESIGN:** Ensure that girls, boys, women, and men, including older people and those with disabilities have access to appropriate and safe WASH services

**IMPLEMENTATION:** Ensure that girls, boys, women, and men, including older people and those with disabilities have access to feedback & complaint mechanisms so that corrective actions can address their specific protection and assistance needs

**RESPONSE MONITORING:** Monitor and evaluate safe and equitable access and use of WASH services in WASH projects

**ACROSS THE RESPONSE:** Give priority to girls (particularly adolescents) and women's participation in the consultation process

## Glossary

[Global Task Force on Cholera Control - resources](#)

[Global Task Force on Cholera Control - Cholera App](#)

[WHO - International Health Regulations \(2005\) Third Edition](#)

[WHO advice on Cholera](#)

[UNICEF - Core Commitments for Children](#)

[Cholera Platform MENA](#)