

TOILET-FOR-ALL: WHO CALLS FOR MORE INVESTMENT

Relevant for: Health, Education & Human Resources | Topic: Health & Sanitation and related issues

Worldwide, 2.3 billion people lack basic sanitation facilities.

The world will not reach the goal of universal sanitation coverage – where every person has access to toilets – by 2030 unless countries make comprehensive policy shifts and invest more funds, the World Health Organization (WHO) warned on Tuesday as it launched the first global guidelines on sanitation and health.

In a release, the WHO said that by adopting its new guidelines, countries can significantly reduce diarrhoeal deaths due to unsafe water and poor sanitation and hygiene. For every US \$1 invested in sanitation, the WHO estimates a nearly six-fold return as measured by lower health costs, increased productivity and fewer premature deaths.

Worldwide, 2.3 billion people lack basic sanitation (with almost half of them forced to defecate in the open). They are among the 4.5 billion without access to safely managed sanitation services – in other words a toilet connected to a sewer or pit or septic tank that treats human waste.

“Without proper access, millions of people the world over are deprived of the dignity, safety and convenience of a decent toilet,” said Dr. Soumya Swaminathan, deputy director-general for programmes, WHO.

“Sanitation is a fundamental foundation of human health and development and underpins the core mission of WHO and ministries of health worldwide. WHO’s Sanitation and Health Guidelines are essential to securing health and well being for everyone, everywhere,” she added.

Cause and effect

The WHO developed the new guidelines on sanitation and health because current sanitation programmes are not achieving anticipated health gains and there is a lack of authoritative health-based guidance on sanitation.

“Billions of people live without access to even the most basic sanitation services,” said Dr. Maria Neira, director, Department of Public Health, Environmental and Social Determinants of Health, WHO.

“Poor sanitation is a major factor in transmission of neglected tropical diseases,” she added.

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