Antimicrobial resistance (AMR) presents a significant threat to human health. World leaders have agreed that tackling AMR will require addressing both health and agriculture concerns with a focus on prevention. Improving infection prevention and control (IPC) and water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) is one of the five objectives in the World Health Organization’s (WHO) AMR Global Action Plan. Nowhere is reducing infection more important than in health care facilities. Joint, immediate action to address IPC and WASH is essential.

THE CURRENT SITUATION IN HEALTH CARE FACILITIES IN LOW- AND MIDDLE-INCOME COUNTRIES

**WASH**
- 38% of health care facilities do not have ANY water source
- 19% do not have improved toilets
- 35% do not have water and soap or alcohol-based hand rub for hand washing

**IPC**
- In Africa, up to 20% of women get a wound infection after a caesarean section
- Hospital-born babies in low-income settings are at a higher risk of being affected by neonatal sepsis, with infection rates 3 to 20 times higher than in high-income settings
- On average 15% of patients will acquire at least one infection in acute care hospitals

**AMR**
- Prophylactic use of antibiotics is standard in over 80% of maternity units in several counties
- Patients with resistant Staphylococcus Aureus are 50% more likely to die than those with a non-resistant infection
- Each year hundreds of millions of cases of diarrhoea are treated with antibiotics. Universal access to WASH could reduce this by 60%

THE CONSEQUENCES OF POOR WASH AND COMPROMISED IPC

1. Increased risk of healthcare-associated infections (HAI)
2. Increased risk of spread of HAI
3. Increased burden of expensive, hard-to-treat and life-threatening resistant infections
4. Decrease in patient confidence in health care

Addressing these challenges will require accelerating joint efforts to improve WASH, IPC and AMR in health care settings.
Goals and objectives

Global Action Plan on AMR’s objective three: Reduce the incidence of infection through effective sanitation, hygiene and infection prevention measures.

WASH and IPC efforts aim to support objective three through joint efforts to ensure every health facility, in every setting, has safely managed water, sanitation, hygiene and waste management facilities and implements effective, evidence-based IPC programs and practices to protect the lives of health workers, patients and all facilities users.

Priority joint AMR, IPC and WASH actions

GLOBAL

Joint advocacy
Raise awareness of the threat of AMR and the critical need to prioritise prevention, particularly in health care facilities, but also in the wider community through universal WASH access.

Ensure WASH in HCF and IPC are prioritised in all AMR global plans, accountability frameworks, policies, and financing mechanisms.

Support global and national leaders to advocate for WASH and IPC in HCF to reduce AMR.

Achieve universal access to and use of adequate toilets and safe drinking water supplies in communities to reduce unnecessary antibiotic use and hospital admissions.

NATIONAL

National action plans
Support the development and implementation of guidelines and National Action Plans for AMR which prioritise IPC and WASH activities and support access to and rational antibiotic use.

Develop systems to strengthen disease surveillance, guidelines on antibiotics use, and laboratory capacity to better diagnose and track HCAIs.

Align prevention efforts with existing health plans and prevention activities, particularly quality universal health coverage and maternal, newborn and child health.

LOCAL

Health care facilities
Support the implementation of WASH standards and improvement and the IPC Core Components Guidelines.

Drive efforts to improve and sustain hand hygiene infrastructure and practices and efforts to support adequate, routine cleaning practices, sterilization and safe health care waste management.

Improve the evidence-base of locally relevant interventions to reduce HAI, improve WASH and IPC and support rational use of antibiotics.

Key WHO tools and guidance to support WASH, IPC and AMR progress

- WHO Essential Environmental Standards in Health Care
- Hand hygiene and AMR policy briefing note
- WHO Hand Hygiene guidelines and implementation tools
- Water and Sanitation for Health Facility Improvement Tool
- New WHO Guidelines on Core Components of IPC and implementation tools
- JMP Core Indicators for WASH in HCF

Can be found at:

ACTION in WASH and IPC

Reduce overall antibiotic demand, use and misuse
Reduce opportunity for resistant strains to emerge
Reduce spread of resistant and non-resistant infections
Reduce cost of expensive treatment of resistant infections
Reduce the risk of all health care associated infections
Drive people-centred quality health care
Increase care seeking and staff morale and productivity

And therefore help reduce antimicrobial resistance.