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Young children most at risk from lack of water, sanitation and hygiene in schools

Despite having known the consequences of dirty drinking water and poor sanitation and hygiene for over 150 years, new data confirms that millions of children still go without at school - putting them unnecessarily at risk of illness and significantly limiting their development, WaterAid says.

A [new report](#) by Unicef and the World Health Organization - the first ever comprehensive global assessment of access to water, sanitation and hygiene in schools – shows that 620 million children do not have decent toilets at school (or 34% of schools). Around 900 million children don't have access to good hygiene services, including the availability of soap, which are absent in nearly half of all schools (47%).

The report – *Drinking Water, Sanitation and Hygiene in Schools: Global baseline report 2018* – also confirms that 31 percent of schools do not have access to clean drinking water, affecting 570 million children.

The new data does not qualify infrastructure alone to be an indicator of access to clean water, decent toilets and good hygiene; schools in which water facilities were not operational or where toilets were not single-sex and unusable when researchers visited, are not considered as having access to these basic services.

Globally, pre-primary and primary schools lack facilities more often than secondary schools – affecting young children at a time that is significant for their cognitive and physical development and growth. Diarrhoea caused by dirty water and poor toilets kills a child under 5 every 2 minutes.

While sufficient data is not available for all countries, the collected data shows shocking results globally: 1 in 3 primary schools do not provide clean water or decent toilets to their students, versus 1 in 4 for secondary schools. Just under half of primary schools do not provide good hygiene – compared to 2 in 5 for secondary schools.

WaterAid Regional Programme Manager for South Asia, Thérèse Mahon, who reviewed the report said:

“The report highlights that millions of children are still left behind: these are the children who could benefit most. We need to target resources to the youngest who

are most at risk from water and sanitation related illness, and to design facilities suitable for children of all ages and those with disabilities.”

“Providing better water, sanitation and hygiene services also plays an important role in improving the quality of education for adolescent girls, so they can manage their periods safely and with dignity at school. A [recent WaterAid and Unicef report](#) shows that as many as 1 in 3 girls in South Asia are missing school days every month, in part due to inadequate toilet facilities lacking water, privacy or disposal options for sanitary pads.”

WaterAid Chief Executive Tim Wainwright said:

“It is clear that, without clean water, decent toilets and good hygiene, we cannot achieve many of the sustainable development goals: quality education for all, gender equality, and universal good health and well-being by 2030. To fulfill these promises, integrating these services into the development agenda is crucial.”

“It is concerning that sufficient data is not available for all countries: better monitoring of the usability of facilities would help governments ensure a healthy learning environment in all schools.”

“Children all over the world have dreams about what they will be when they grow up, but without access to water and sanitation, many children do not get a fair chance at reaching their full potential. It is essential for governments to ensure that facilities are available and usable, or investments in water, sanitation and hygiene - and children’s futures – will be wasted.”

In July, world leaders reaffirmed their commitment to the sustainable development goals, following high-level meetings at the United Nations in New York. At current rates of progress, we are still woefully behind the provision of clean water and decent sanitation for everyone, everywhere by 2030, which is fundamental to almost every area of development and to achieving the SDGs.

Kelly Ann Naylor, UNICEF Global Chief of Water, Sanitation and Hygiene said:

“If education is the key to helping children escape poverty, access to water and sanitation is key to helping children safely maximize their education. To neglect this is to be careless with the wellbeing and health of children. However, we face the uphill battle of ensuring funds are prioritized to install and maintain basic water, sanitation and hygiene services in all schools.”

ENDS

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Notes to Editors:

WaterAid

WaterAid is working to make clean water, decent toilets and good hygiene normal for everyone, everywhere within a generation. The international not-for-profit organisation works in 34 countries to change the lives of the poorest and most marginalised people. Since 1981, WaterAid has reached 25.8 million people with clean water and 25.1 million people with decent toilets. For more information, visit www.wateraid.org, follow @wateraid or @WaterAidPress on Twitter, or find WaterAid UK on Facebook at www.facebook.com/wateraid.

- 844 million people in the world – one in nine – do not have clean water close to home.¹
- 2.3 billion people in the world – almost one in three – do not have a decent toilet of their own.²
- Around 289,000 children under five die every year from diarrhoeal diseases caused by poor water and sanitation. That's almost 800 children a day, or one child every two minutes.³
- Every £1 invested in water and toilets returns an average of £4 in increased productivity.⁴
- Just £15 can provide one person with clean water.⁵
- To find out if countries are keeping their promises on water and sanitation, see the online database www.WASHwatch.org

¹ WHO/UNICEF Joint Monitoring Programme (JMP) *Progress on drinking water, sanitation and hygiene: 2017 update and SDG Baselines*

² WHO/UNICEF Joint Monitoring Programme (JMP) *Progress on drinking water, sanitation and hygiene: 2017 update and SDG Baselines*

³ washwatch.org

⁴ World Health organization (2012) Global costs and benefits of drinking-water supply and sanitation interventions to reach the MDG target and universal coverage

⁵ www.wateraid.org