



# State of the World's HAND HYGIENE

A global call to action to make hand hygiene  
a priority in policy and practice



World Health  
Organization

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for every child

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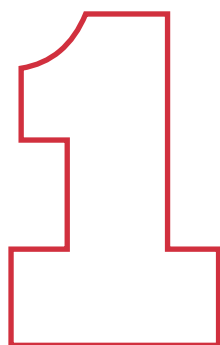
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# Foreword

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When COVID-19 emerged nearly two years ago, the world was without vaccines or medicines for this novel virus. One of the most critical tools in our arsenal for preventing infection was also one of our oldest: hand hygiene. But it was one that nearly a third of the world could not use.

The benefits of hand hygiene in preventing the transmission of infectious diseases have been known since 1850. For example, proper hand hygiene has been proven to reduce deaths from respiratory and diarrheal diseases in children under five by 21 per cent and 30 per cent respectively.

Yet in 2021, an estimated 2.3 billion people globally cannot wash their hands with soap and water at home and one-third of the world's health facilities lack hand hygiene resources at the point of care. Meanwhile, nearly half of schools worldwide do not have basic hygiene services, affecting 817 million children.

Over the past five years, half a billion people have gained access to basic hand hygiene facilities – a rate of 300,000 per day. This is progress, but it is far too slow. At the current rate, almost two billion people will still lack access to basic hand hygiene facilities in 2030, negatively impacting other development priorities, including education, health, nutrition, and economic growth.

COVID-19 created a unique moment for hand hygiene, with unprecedented attention, resources, and political will. However, we know from previous emergencies that such attention can be fleeting. In 2020, UNICEF, WHO and other partners launched the *Hand Hygiene for All* initiative, with the aim of channeling momentum around hand hygiene into long-term sustainable change.

*The State of the World's Hand Hygiene* is the flagship report of the *Hand Hygiene for All* initiative, and is a companion piece to last year's *State of the World's Sanitation* report. The report's message is clear: we must quadruple the current rate of progress

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