

WASH Cluster Iraq

COVID-19 Lessons Learned

KEY EVENTS

- **March 1, 2020** - Health, CCCM and WASH COVID-19 Awareness session
- **March 9, 2020** – CCCM, Health, and WASH Clusters with ACTED release Key messages for COVID-19 in Formal IDP Camps
- **March 15, 2020** – First WASH Cluster COVID-19 taskforce meeting
- **March 18, 2020** - National WASH Cluster Iraq COVID-19 Technical Guidelines published
- **March 24, 2020** – CCCM launches first guidance on camp level preparedness and response for COVID-19 v1.0
- **March 26, 2020** – Second COVID-19 taskforce meeting
- **March 29, 2020** – WASH/Health Cluster Health and Hygiene Promotion Guidelines published
- **April 5, 2020** – Third WASH Cluster COVID-19 taskforce meeting
- **April 16, 2020** – Fourth COVID-19 taskforce meeting
- **April 21, 2020** – CCCM Guidance and Key Messages for COVID-19 in camps and informal settlements published
- **May 5, 2020** – CCCM launches guidance for COVID-19 Preparedness and Response in Informal Settlements
- **May 13, 2020** – National WASH Cluster Meeting (incorporating COVID-19 taskforce updates)
- **July 12, 2020** – Revised WASH Cluster Technical Guidelines & Health and Hygiene Promotion Guidelines published (v2.0)

BACKGROUND

In February 2020, the first case of COVID-19 was recorded in Iraq. In response to this threat, clusters in Iraq began mobilizing resources to prepare for an increase of cases throughout the country. The WASH Cluster, along with the Health Cluster and the Camp Coordination and Camp Management (CCCM) Cluster, were the first clusters to mobilize, with a full Inter-Cluster Coordination Group mobilization occurring by the end of March. The response included development of technical guidance, updated ActivityInfo reporting mechanisms, and a revision of the HRP to include increase targets and funding needed to combat COVID-19.

In order to reflect back on the response for future outbreaks of COVID-19 or other infectious diseases, the WASH Cluster, with the support of Mercy Corps and their donor USAID/BHA, organized a lessons learned workshop for COVID-19 on February 2 and 3, 2021 for selected partners to share their thoughts on what worked well, what didn't work well, and what the cluster can do moving forward for COVID-19 response. For partners that could not attend the workshop, the cluster conducted an anonymous survey for feedback to be considered by the larger group.

SURVEY RESULTS

The WASH Cluster COVID-19 response survey was open for one week, and during that period, 41 people provided feedback on the cluster's performance during the pandemic. The survey covered cluster specific technical guidance, internal partner coordination, coordination with other cluster/sector/working groups, and integration with existing programs. Partners were given the opportunity to provide open ended feedback, as well as an overall rating of the response.

In general, cluster partners had favorable feedback on the effectiveness of the WASH Cluster response to COVID-19. 100% of respondents ranked the cluster response as a 3 or higher on a scale of 5, showing no respondent being dissatisfied with the response. 71% of respondents were aware of the WASH Cluster COVID-19 task force meetings, with 86% of those attending the meetings. Respondents indicated that the WASH Cluster guidance released was timely and of high quality, with 0% of respondents listing themselves as dissatisfied or very dissatisfied with the guidance provided. Cluster partners were in general satisfied with the contents of the hygiene kits and the suggested messages and frequency for hygiene promotion activities, with only 2% and 7% of partners respectively expressing dissatisfaction.

There were also a few areas where cluster partners indicated room for improvement in the COVID-19 response. Partner indicated a lack of knowledge regarding the WASH cluster's coordination with NFI/Shelter Cluster and Cash Working group, with 54% and 66% respectively not knowing about the coordination. Additionally, partners expressed dissatisfaction with the cluster's response in schools and areas of return. Partner's highlighted a need to better engage with the government and other clusters, and the share the results of that coordination more widely for partners to be aware.

KEY DOCUMENTS

- [COVID-19 WASH Technical Guidance](#)
- [COVID-19 Health and Hygiene Promotion Guidance](#)
- [Iraq Guidance on Camp Level Preparedness and Response for COVID-19](#)
- [Iraq Key Messages for COVID-19 Health/WASH/CCCM Clusters for Formal Camps](#)
- [Iraq Key Messages for COVID-19 Health/WASH/CCCM Clusters for Informal Settlements](#)
- [Iraq Construction Site Safety Protocols for COVID-19 Contexts](#)

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SUCCESSSES IN WASH CLUSTER COVID-19 RESPONSE

Upon reflection on the results of the anonymous survey and group discussions, the participants highlighted the following as some of the successes of the WASH Cluster in the COVID-19 Iraq response:

- Rapid development of COVID-19 guidance documents for partner use (within 1 month of the first confirmed case in country), and updating of documents when new information became available
- Strong engagement with partners in the early stages of the response through COVID-19 taskforce meetings, COVID-19 skype group, and mapping exercises.
- Collaboration with other clusters (Health, CCCM, Shelter, etc.) to develop joint guidance for camps, informal settlements and construction activities.
- Development of innovative ways to monitor the response, including the joint Health, CCCM and WASH Cluster ActivityInfo mapping and the WASH Cluster camp and informal settlement hygiene kit distribution tracker.

CHALLENGES IN WASH CLUSTER COVID-19 RESPONSE

While overall the results of the survey and the workshop highlighted a successful response, there were some challenges highlighted by the partners, as follows:

- Lack of dedicated training/orientation on all WASH Cluster Guidance documents
- Sub-National Cluster meetings were not used during the first few months to coordinate the response locally.
- WASH Cluster meetings did not include experts from Health and CCCM clusters to brief on COVID-19
- Guidance was primarily for COVID-19 response in camps and informal settlements – limited guidance on COVID-19 response in areas of return
- The right person does not always attend the meeting, which can hinder decision making and implementation of new initiatives or guidance.

WASH CLUSTER ACTION PLAN FOR COVID-19 RESPONSE

Based on the discussions with the partners in attendance, the WASH Cluster developed the following action points for prioritization in the next three months to prepare for ongoing outbreaks and future contingency planning:

- Revise WASH Cluster and Health Cluster Health and Hygiene Promotion Guidance documents
- Revise WASH Cluster Technical Guidance for COVID-19, including water provision and kit contents
- Develop new Technical Guidance on school reopening and WASH Requirements, in collaboration with the Education Cluster
- Develop new Technical Guidance on out of camp COVID-19 response for areas of return
- Conduct a refresher training with all WASH Cluster Partners on the existing and revised COVID-19 guidance documents
- Develop a single one-page document with links to all Iraq technical response guidance from all partners
- Develop a COVID-19 Contingency and Response Plan, in collaboration with the Health Cluster, WHO, UNICEF, and the Iraqi Government