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## Handwashing and water security in the context of a pandemic

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The COVID-19 pandemic is a wake-up call for water security issues. It makes us acutely aware how crucial access, and ability, for adequate hand hygiene are for reducing transmission risks of communicable diseases. An estimated 40% of households globally lack access to basic handwashing facilities. A recent cross-cultural study of household water insecurity experiences (HWISE) found that nearly one in four of 6,637 randomly sampled households across 23 sites in 20 low- and middle-income countries. Similar water, sanitation and hygiene problems impact on poorer families in high-income nations too.

We explore the challenge of hand hygiene in a changing water world and reflect on the importance of making rapid progress towards “ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all” (UN Sustainable Development Goal 6). We contest that urgent action on water security is essential to better prepare societies for the future, including global health crises. Drawing on the latest evidence, we provide recommendations on how to increase handwashing, and improve human health and wellbeing more broadly, by reducing water insecurity. Across our world, policymakers must focus on: investment in water infrastructure, water independent alternatives, and behavioural change and knowledge promotion. Moreover, we must prioritise holistic, evidence-based solutions that address 3 facets of water (in)security: availability, quality & accessibility.