

## ► Policy Brief

August 2020

*A joint policy brief by the ILO Sectoral Policies Department (SECTOR) and the Labour Administration, Labour Inspection and Occupational Safety and Health Branch (LABADMIN/OSH)*

# Hand hygiene at the workplace: an essential occupational safety and health prevention and control measure against COVID-19

Workplaces, particularly those that employ migrant workers and those in the informal economy, have taken centre stage in the containment of the COVID-19 virus. In their efforts to promote decent work in all affected economic sectors, ILO constituents have provided valuable advice and tools through a broad range of international instruments to promote occupational safety and health (OSH). The ILO Centenary Declaration for the Future of Work, adopted by the 108th Session of the International Labour Conference (Geneva, 2019), emphasizes that safe and healthy working conditions are fundamental to decent work. In this context, the Director-General of the ILO has joined the World leaders' [Call to Action on COVID-19](#), which reaffirms that "[w]ater, sanitation and hand hygiene, together with physical distancing, are central to preventing the spread of COVID-19".



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With support from Eswatini Beverages, WaterAid Eswatini has provided five group handwashing stations in rural areas, as well as hygiene supplies for market vendors

## ► 1. The impact of COVID-19

Coronaviruses are spread through respiratory secretions or droplets, and potentially via contaminated surfaces. Along with other important behaviour, such as physical distancing, frequent and thorough handwashing with soap and water is one of the best ways to prevent the

spread of infectious diseases, and is the first line of defence against COVID-19.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> WHO (2020), [Water, sanitation, hygiene, and waste management for the COVID-19 virus: Interim guidance](#), 29 July.

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However, much progress still needs to be made in this regard. Around the world, an estimated 1 billion people are at immediate risk of COVID-19 simply because they lack basic handwashing facilities. These facilities are often missing in places where they are most needed, including schools and workplaces, and particularly in high-risk settings, such as the health-care sector. In fact, forty-three per cent of health-care settings do not have hand hygiene facilities at points of care where patients are treated.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, 19 per cent of schools worldwide have limited handwashing facilities (water but no soap), and 25 per cent have no facilities whatsoever – a situation that directly impacts the health of children, as well as teachers and other school staff.<sup>3</sup> Although 93 per cent of the countries reporting to UN-Water included handwashing in their hygiene strategies, only 9 per cent of hygiene strategies are fully costed and only 10 per cent have sufficient human resources for their implementation.<sup>4</sup>

## Why is workplace hand hygiene so important?

Handwashing is especially important at the workplace, where large numbers of people often congregate in close quarters. Individuals may spend most of their waking hours at work, increasing the risk of infectious exposure, especially in high-density situations, not only from other workers, but also from customers and clients. Handwashing is especially important in situations where:

- ▶ people who are ill or vulnerable are concentrated (health-care settings, nursing homes);
- ▶ food is prepared and eaten (workplace canteens); and
- ▶ workplace accommodation, especially where young children are present.

According to the ILO's hierarchy of controls,<sup>5</sup> lower-priority measures should be used only where higher-priority measures are not available or practicable. In the case of the virus that causes COVID-19, as it is not yet possible to eliminate or substitute the hazard, handwashing [constitutes](#) a measure of organizational or administrative control, involving a change in work policy or procedures, in order to reduce or minimize exposure to a hazard. It constitutes part of a comprehensive approach of workplace prevention and control measures for COVID-19, as well as other diseases. The promotion of a culture of frequent and thorough handwashing, including by providing workers, customers and worksite visitors with places to wash their hands, is

therefore essential.<sup>6</sup> If soap and running water are not immediately available, employers should provide alcohol-based hand rubs containing between 60 and 80 per cent alcohol, as long as hands are not soiled.

However, access to improved water and sanitation facilities does not, on its own, necessarily lead to improved health and hygiene. Evidence shows that hygienic behaviour is crucial to protecting against illness and disease, and that handwashing with soap at key moments (including after sneezing or coughing, and before preparing and eating food) is of central importance.

The ILO has accordingly issued the following [recommendations](#):

- ▶ Promote a culture of frequent and thorough handwashing, including by providing places where workers, customers and worksite visitors can wash their hands.
- ▶ Encourage respiratory etiquette, including covering coughs and sneezes.
- ▶ Discourage workers from using other workers' phones, desks, offices or other work tools and equipment, when possible.
- ▶ Implement regular housekeeping, including routine cleaning and disinfecting of surfaces, equipment and other elements of the work environment
- ▶ Promote a culture of regularly cleaning and disinfecting the surfaces of desks and workstations, door handles, telephones, keyboards and work tools, and regularly disinfect common areas, such as sanitary facilities and elevators.

A WASH-focused hazard identification process during workplace risk assessments and walk-through inspections can encourage the adoption of measures such as the provision of handwashing stations and sanitation facilities (including showers and lockers for personal clothing), welfare facilities (kitchens, canteens, rest areas), as well as general cleanliness of the work environment. It can also help identify less obvious organizational factors that need to be improved, such as worksite WASH policies and practices, rest-room breaks, work hours and practices that may shorten rest breaks.

## What is necessary for proper handwashing?

Handwashing facilities need to be available in sufficient quantities at the workplace and accessible to all. Four components are required for such facilities: access to

<sup>2</sup> WHO and UNICEF (2020). [Hand hygiene for all](#).

<sup>3</sup> United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and World Health Organization (2020), [Progress on drinking water, sanitation and hygiene in schools: special focus on COVID-19](#).

<sup>4</sup> UN-Water and WHO (2019), [Hygiene: UN-Water GLAAS findings on national policies, plans, targets and finance](#), GLAAS: UN-Water Global Analysis and Assessment of Sanitation and Drinking Water.

<sup>5</sup> ILO (2001). [Guidelines on occupational safety and health management systems: ILO-OSH 2001](#).

<sup>6</sup> For more information, see ILO (2020). [A safe and healthy return to work during the COVID-19 pandemic: Policy brief](#).

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washbasins, soap, running potable water and single-use towels or other means of hand drying.

## Washbasins (or other handwashing facilities)

These are the structures that allow workers to wash their hands using running water.

- ▶ They can come in all shapes and sizes, and can be single use, or allow for many workers to wash their hands at the same time (group handwashing facilities), depending on the workplace.
- ▶ They must be fully accessible to people with disabilities.
- ▶ They should, where possible, be attached to a piped water system that provides running water through a tap or faucet.
- ▶ Drainage, or a system for collecting wastewater, is also necessary, as wastewater may contain germs or hazardous materials washed off hands. Appropriate drainage is also necessary for vector control.

## Running water

Water from a piped water source is less likely to be contaminated than still water, such as water in a tub or bucket, which may contain germs or hazardous substances from others who have washed their hands. Other aspects to consider include:

- ▶ Running water should have sufficient water pressure.
- ▶ Whenever possible, potable water should be provided for handwashing to reduce the risk of contamination. In situations where potable water is not available, non-potable water should be clearly marked with recognizable signage.
- ▶ Water temperature is important. Warm water helps to break down the dirt and grime that often carries germs. During work in cold temperatures, it may also help promote handwashing by increasing comfort.

### Running water without a piped system

The ideal situation is to have piped running water available for handwashing facilities. However, not having access to piped running water does not mean that workers cannot wash their hands properly. Other methods could include a hanging container filled with clean water. When a tap is attached, it can release the water in small amounts to run over hands during washing. See the UNICEF guide: *"How to make a Tippy Tap."*

## Soap or soap alternatives

Proper handwashing requires soap, or a soap alternative. Washing hands with water alone is significantly less effective in removing germs. Soap is important because:

- ▶ soap breaks down the grease and dirt that carry germs through rubbing and friction;
- ▶ using soap adds to the time spent washing, which increases the likelihood that germs will be removed or destroyed;
- ▶ the clean smell and feeling that soap creates is an incentive for its use.

### Soap alternatives

1. Alcohol-based handrub: WHO also recommends using alcohol-based handrub in situations where there is no access to soap and water. The steps include:
  - ensure that the handrub comes into contact with all hand surfaces;
  - rub hands together vigorously, paying attention to the fingertips;
  - stop rubbing when the solution has evaporated and the hands are dry;
  - ensure that hands are washed with soap and water after several consecutive applications of alcohol-based handrub.
2. Ash: in situations where soap is not available, WHO recommends the use of small amounts of wood ash or coal ash as a soap alternative, rather than the use of water alone, provided that the ash will not clog water pipes.

Sources:

- Adams, J., Bantram, J., Chartier, Y. and J. Sims (eds.) (2009). *Water, sanitation and hygiene standards for schools in low-cost settings*, WHO.

Some work tasks can make the hands extremely dirty, or can leave them covered in materials that are difficult to remove, such as paint. Hazardous materials, including paint solvent and other chemicals, should not be used to wash hands, as they can be dangerous for human health.

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**Hand towels or dryers**

After handwashing, the hands should be dried. Wet hands are slippery and can cause unintentional accidents at the workplace. To promote hand drying, towels or other suitable means of drying should be located near washbasins. These may include single-use towels made of paper or other materials, or air-dryers. Whatever means are used to dry hands, it is critical that they are sanitary. Where not all germs are removed during handwashing, they may be transferred to the towel used for drying, which means that:

- each towel should be used by only *one* worker and should be used only *once*;

- after use, it should be disposed of immediately (in a closed bin in the case of single-use towels), or left in the appropriate place for laundering.




**The proper way to wash hands**

Handwashing should take at least 40 seconds, as indicated in the step-by-step guide below. This guide should be posted at the workplace as a reminder.

# How to Handwash?

WASH HANDS WHEN VISIBLY SOILED! OTHERWISE, USE HANDRUB

**Duration of the entire procedure: 40-60 seconds**

<p><b>0</b></p>  <p>Wet hands with water;</p>	<p><b>1</b></p>  <p>Apply enough soap to cover all hand surfaces;</p>	<p><b>2</b></p>  <p>Rub hands palm to palm;</p>
<p><b>3</b></p>  <p>Right palm over left dorsum with interlaced fingers and vice versa;</p>	<p><b>4</b></p>  <p>Palm to palm with fingers interlaced;</p>	<p><b>5</b></p>  <p>Backs of fingers to opposing palms with fingers interlocked;</p>
<p><b>6</b></p>  <p>Rotational rubbing of left thumb clasped in right palm and vice versa;</p>	<p><b>7</b></p>  <p>Rotational rubbing, backwards and forwards with clasped fingers of right hand in left palm and vice versa;</p>	<p><b>8</b></p>  <p>Rinse hands with water;</p>
<p><b>9</b></p>  <p>Dry hands thoroughly with a single use towel;</p>	<p><b>10</b></p>  <p>Use towel to turn off faucet;</p>	<p><b>11</b></p>  <p>Your hands are now safe.</p>

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Handwashing has always been a simple and effective measure to protect workers' health, whether from hazardous substances or biological contagions. However, in the midst of an ongoing pandemic, when the virus can be spread to other workers, customers, or surfaces, it is *even more important* that workers wash their hands regularly and frequently, especially at key moments in the working day, as indicated below.

Before	After
Before starting work or a new work task	After using the toilet or urinal
Before eating or drinking	After exposure to human excreta from cleaning or accidents, or from changing diapers
Before handling or serving food or drink	After exposure to human biological liquids, such as nasal discharges while sneezing
Before starting a new work activity or task where clean hands are important (i.e. handling patients in a health-care setting)	After exposure to dangerous materials, including animal waste, pesticides and toxic solvents
Before going home	After caring for infected or sick (or potentially infected or sick) persons or their contaminated materials

## Where should washbasins be located?

Workplace sanitation and hygiene go hand-in-hand. As such, washbasins should always be located in close proximity to any exposure that presents a health risk, and in places where clean hands are necessary to promote workplace health. Work areas that may expose workers to the virus should also have a washbasin nearby. For example, in the health services sector, washbasins are essential not only next to toilets, but also in medical examination or operating rooms. They must also be fully accessible to people with disabilities. Other areas include:

- **Toilets and urinals:** any workplace toilet or urinal should have a washbasin with soap and water in close proximity. The proximity of the washbasin to the toilet should remind and encourage workers to wash their hands after using a toilet or urinal and before returning to work.
- **Workplace cooking facilities and canteens:** a washbasin with soap and water in a workplace cooking facility is important for routine handwashing before and during the preparation and serving of food and drink. A washbasin may also be provided in a canteen to remind workers of the need to wash hands before eating and drinking.
- **Workplace accommodation:** washbasins with soap and water should be located in workplace accommodation when it is provided for workers, including in close proximity to toilets and urinals, and in cooking facilities.

## ► 2. Responses by tripartite constituents and partners

Handwashing has historically been a concern in industry, and collective agreements have included measures for its promotion, both before and during the pandemic.<sup>7</sup> They commit employers to providing washing facilities, and to encouraging and ensuring sufficient time for their use. Many unions provide advice on handwashing in their COVID-19 information sheets, and have even cited the lack of facilities or time allowed for handwashing as reasons for striking or refusing to return to work.<sup>8</sup>

Governments, social partners and civil society actors, with the support of the international community, have focussed on handwashing as a way to prevent or reduce the spread of COVID-19. The [Hand Hygiene for All Global Initiative](#), in which the ILO is a partner, calls on governments, employers and civil society actors across a broad range of private industries, businesses and agriculture, and those who run workplaces, commercial buildings and public institutions, to show their commitment to the health of their employees and those

<sup>7</sup> See, for example: Belgium, [Collective Agreement](#) for hairdressing and beauty services (2013); Colombia, [Biosecurity Protocol](#) for banana workers, 25 March 2020; France, [National Joint deliberations](#) regarding the position of the automotive industry in the context of the sanitary crises related to the COVID-19 epidemic, 19 March 2020; Canada, [Collective Agreement](#) for the maritime sector (2018); Argentina, Córdoba Province, COVID [Protocol](#) to Collective Agreement (No. 735/15) for the construction sector; and Spain, [Collective Agreement](#) for the meat industry.

<sup>8</sup> American Federation of Teachers (USA, 2020), "[To ensure students' safety, strikes could be used as a last resort](#)", 28 July; "Amazon Tells Staff Hand-Washing Time Won't Be Held Against Them"; Contrados.org (2020), "[Honoring David Cruz, Agricultural Worker who Died from COVID-19 During Worker Strike in Washington](#)", 15 June.

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who visit their premises through the adoption of hand hygiene policies and facilities.

Many governments, United Nations agencies and NGOs have taken measures to promote handwashing to prevent the spread of COVID-19, including:

- [Water operators](#) in [Bangladesh](#), Eswatini, Guinea, Honduras, Madagascar, Nigeria, [Pakistan](#) and Peru, among others, have taken measures to facilitate and promote handwashing.
- Nigeria has also established a WASH sector COVID-19 response committee, which has leveraged support from the private sector to install hands-free handwashing facilities in vulnerable places.
- In [Malawi](#), the government and social partners issued guidelines requiring employers to provide handwashing facilities for their workers.
- A European Commission decision of 11 June 2020<sup>9</sup> requires employers to provide workers with appropriate and adequate washing facilities, which may include skin antiseptics, among measures to combat COVID-19.
- The ILO Employment-Intensive Investment Programme supports water and sanitation [infrastructure](#) in several countries, including [Jordan](#) and [Philippines](#), and has launched a COVID-related initiative in [South Africa](#), that has hired 20,000 young people to help with the distribution of sanitizers and soap, provide education on hygiene-prevention measures, disinfect high-risk areas and conduct clean-up campaigns. A pilot project in [Tunisia](#) has identified these improvements as a priority.
- The ILO Better Work [Nicaragua](#) Programme has helped the national garment sector to develop an emergency COVID-19 response, which promotes frequent handwashing and provides guidance to employers. In [Indonesia](#), the Programme has rolled out a step-by-step action plan for factories to inform workers about handwashing and other measures, using the latest ILO and WHO advice. In [Bangladesh](#), Better Work partners have installed handwashing facilities and are urging workers to wash their hands regularly.
- The [Water Supply and Sanitation Collaborative Council](#) has also sponsored government activities

to promote handwashing. In Benin, the national COVID-19 response committee is responding to the call by the Ministry of Health to provide handwashing stations and soap for health-care facilities. It has also provided support to the Government-led National Preparedness and Response Plan for COVID-19 to promote proper handwashing in health-care facilities and the distribution of soap to 18 hospitals and 45 community clinics. The Committee is also disseminating leaflets, posters and other materials on the importance of good hygiene in communities and health-care facilities, reaching an estimated 128,000 people.

- In [Eritrea](#), UNICEF is providing support for the Ministry of Health to implement the national COVID-19 response through the promotion of handwashing on the television and radio, and through demonstrations of handwashing at health-care facilities, schools and community facilities. It has also equipped 2,000 schools and 400 health facilities with handwashing stations and has designed new facilities accessible to people with disabilities.

Another challenge has arisen in relation to current refugee crises: 57 per cent of Lebanese nationals who responded to an ILO-led survey reported being able to wash their hands frequently in the workplace, but only 37 per cent of Syrian refugees in Lebanon could do so.<sup>10</sup>

9 Commission Directive (EU) 2020/739 of 3 June 2020 amending Annex III to Directive 2000/54/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council as regards the inclusion of SARS-CoV-2 in the list of biological agents known to infect humans and amending Commission Directive (EU) 2019/1833 classifies SARS-CoV-2 as a risk group 3 biological agent (the second highest risk level) under Directive 2000/54/EC. Member States are required to implement the decision by 24 November 2020.

10 Kebede, T.A., Stave, S.E. and M. Kattaa (2020). [Facing multiple crises: Rapid assessment of the impact of COVID-19 on vulnerable workers and small-scale enterprises in Lebanon](#), report from the Initiative on assessing the impact of COVID-19 on labour markets in Arab States, ILO and Fafo Institute for Labour and Social Research.

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The ILO has drawn particular attention to the plight of informal workers in the context of COVID-19. “Informal workers may not be able to comply with the precautions mandated by health authorities, such as physical distancing, handwashing or self-isolation, which increases the risk of contagion. The protection of informal workers must focus on prevention through the timely dissemination of information on and awareness-raising of the transmission of the

disease. Basic infection control measures, such as respiratory hygiene, cough etiquette and the use of personal protective equipment (PPE), are essential when other more sophisticated engineering controls may not be available.”<sup>1</sup>

In Kenya, the Government has launched a coordinated effort to identify vulnerable groups, such as casual daily workers, with a view to providing them with handwashing facilities.

<sup>1</sup> ILO (2020). “A safe and healthy return to work during the COVID-19 pandemic”, op. cit., para. 11.

## ► 3. ILO tools and responses

Since the onset of the pandemic, the ILO has issued a range of information materials to assist member States and constituents. General OSH materials include: the [Action Checklist on the Prevention and Mitigation of COVID-19 at Work](#); the [Policy Brief for a safe and healthy return to work during the COVID-19 pandemic](#); and the [Guide on a Safe Return to Work: Ten Action Points](#).

The ILO has developed an innovative solution, with the engagement of employers’ and workers’ organizations, to ensure the supply of affordable hand sanitizer at workplaces through the engagement of networks of people living with HIV.<sup>11</sup> Income-generation projects involving the production and sale of hand sanitizer by people living with HIV are being implemented in Zambia and India. This approach provides affordable hand sanitizer to ensure the safety of workers from COVID-19 and other infections, helps generate income for people living with HIV who are primarily engaged in the informal economy and have lost their livelihood due to COVID-19. In addition, the ILO’s ongoing VCT@WORK Initiative is undertaking awareness programmes among Kenyan workers on prevention through regular handwashing and the use of masks.

The [ILO Occupational Safety and Health Convention](#), 1981 (No. 155), defines the term health in relation to work, as “not merely the absence of disease or infirmity; it also includes the physical and mental elements affecting health which are directly related to safety and hygiene at work.” This definition is critical to developing

legal provisions requiring access to safe water, sanitation and hygiene at the workplace, particularly in sectors such as mining and agriculture, where the distinction between the working and living environment is not clear. Its accompanying [Recommendation](#) (No. 164) provides more precise indications on sanitary installations and washing facilities.

The [Promotional Framework for Occupational Safety and Health Convention](#), 2006 (No. 187), establishes the general duty of governments to “promote continuous improvement of occupational safety and health to prevent occupational injuries, diseases and deaths, by the development, in consultation with the most representative organizations of employers and workers, of a national policy, national system and national programme.” Its accompanying [Recommendation](#) (No. 197) advises member States, when formulating and reviewing national programmes, to take into account the ILO instruments relevant to the promotional framework for occupational safety and health.

Article 19 of the [Safety and Health in Agriculture Convention](#), 2001 (No. 184), provides that “[n]ational laws and regulations or the competent authority shall prescribe, after consultation with the representative organizations of employers and workers concerned: [...] the provision of adequate welfare facilities at no cost to the worker, and [...] the minimum accommodation standards for workers who are required by the nature of the work to live temporarily or permanently in the

<sup>11</sup> ILO (2020). [COVID-19 and the world of work: A focus on people living with HIV: Policy brief](#) (June).

undertaking.” Its accompanying [Recommendation](#) (No. 192) calls for measures for the handling of biological agents giving rise to risks of infection to include the provision of washing facilities, and the maintenance and cleaning of personal protective equipment.

The [Plantations Convention](#), 1958 (No. 110), provides that the appropriate authorities shall,

in consultation with the representatives of the employers’ and workers’ organisations concerned, where such exist, encourage the provision of adequate housing accommodation for plantation workers. [...] The minimum standards and specifications of the accommodation to be provided [...] shall be laid down by the appropriate public authority. [...] Such minimum standards shall include specifications concerning [...] cooking, washing, storage, water supply and sanitary facilities.

The [ILO code of practice on safety and health in agriculture](#) (2010) indicates that employers should seek to eliminate zoonotic diseases through, inter alia, work environment and labour camp sanitation and the enforcement of regular handwashing.

The [Safety and Health in Construction Convention](#), 1988 (No. 167), provides that men and women workers should be provided with separate sanitary and washing facilities. The [ILO code of practice on safety and health in construction](#) (1992) indicates that the scale of provision of sanitary facilities should comply with the requirements of the competent authority. In addition, adequate washing facilities should be provided as near as practicable to toilet facilities. Washing facilities should not be used for any other purpose, and should be kept clean and maintained. There should be a sufficient number of appropriate washing facilities for use if workers are exposed to skin contamination.

The [codes of practice on safety and health in underground coalmines](#) (2009) and in the [iron and steel industry](#) (2005) recommend employers to provide adequate washing facilities that are conveniently accessible, protected from contamination from the workplace, and suitable to the nature and degree of exposure. They should include hot and cold or warm running water, soap or other cleaning materials, and towels or other appropriate drying arrangements.

Other sector-specific international labour standards require or recommend similar measures, adapted to the sector covered:

- The [ILO Hygiene \(Commerce and Offices\) Convention](#), 1963 (No. 120), requires employers to provide and maintain sufficient and suitable washing facilities for workers.
- The [Occupational Safety and Health \(Dock Work\) Convention](#), 1979 (No. 152), requires employers to provide a sufficient number of sanitary and washing facilities at each dock that are adequate, suitable and properly maintained, and are within a reasonable distance of the workplace, wherever practicable.
- The [ILO code of practice on safety and health in the construction of fixed offshore installations in the petroleum industry](#) (1981) calls on employers to provide at least one wash basin with hot and cold running water for every six persons. The washing facilities should not be used for any other purpose, and should include adequate means of removing waste water, suitable non-irritating soap in sufficient quantity and adequate drying facilities.

In addition, ILO sectoral tripartite meetings have adopted relevant conclusions. For example, the [guidelines on safety and health in shipbreaking for Asian countries and Turkey](#) (2004) call on employers to provide sanitary facilities at or within reasonable access of every shipbreaking location or premises, which comply with the requirements of the competent authority regarding their scale, installation and construction, and are conveniently accessible, but situated so that they are not exposed to contamination from the workplace. Shelters should have facilities for washing, taking meals and for drying and storing clothing.

The participants at the [Tripartite sectoral meeting on safety and health in the road transport sector](#) (October 2015) emphasized the severe impact of long-haul travel and the lack of adequate bathroom access for road transport workers, and made an urgent call for tripartite constituents to “actively engage in workplace health promotion activities to support healthy behaviour in the workplace [and] to provide adequate access to sanitary facilities”. It was noted that the lack of such facilities can have negative consequences for all transport workers, particularly women.



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Social dialogue, consisting of the exchange of information, consultation and negotiation, on the measures to be taken, plays a vital role in shaping the required policies and actions. The following ILO Conventions are particularly relevant in this respect:

- ▶ the [Freedom of Association and Protection of the Right to Organise Convention](#), 1948 (No. 87)
- ▶ the [Right to Organise and Collective Bargaining Convention](#), 1949 (No. 98)
- ▶ the [Labour Administration Convention](#), 1978 (No. 150)
- ▶ the [Labour Relations \(Public Service\) Convention](#), 1978 (No. 151), and
- ▶ the [Collective Bargaining Convention](#), 1981 (No. 154).

Convention No. 155 also provides that employers and governments should establish arrangements to allow workers, their representatives and employers to cooperate in the fulfilment of legal obligations relating to OSH. Information technology can facilitate action to address both health concerns and social dialogue.

In these unprecedented times, as lessons are learned from the continually unfolding pandemic, it is becoming increasingly clear that unhygienic work practices anywhere can pose a threat to human health everywhere. As such, workplaces play an essential role in preventing COVID-19 infection worldwide. Until effective treatments or vaccines are available, solidarity is the best means of responding to the pandemic. As countries reopen for business, governments, workers and employers must join forces to stifle the pandemic through safe working practices and facilities. The promotion of safe access to water and sanitation infrastructure, and handwashing at work, are an important means of preventing this and future pandemics.

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