



JOINT  
ENVIRONMENT  
UNIT

TOGETHER  
FOR A BETTER  
RESPONSE

# Environmental Linkages of COVID19 & UNEP Response

Lessons from last 6 months and plans for the future

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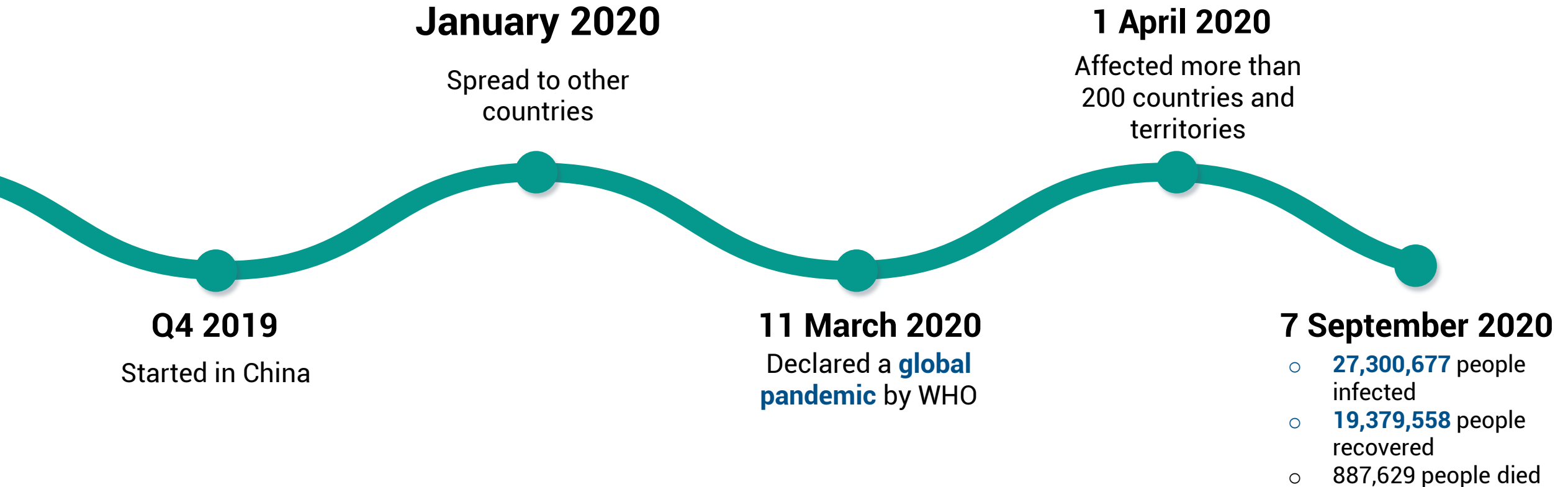
Muralee Thummarukudy  
Operations Manager  
UNEP Crisis Management Branch

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Briefing on Ongoing Environmental Emergencies for the Geneva Environment Network (GEN)  
8<sup>th</sup> September 2020

# COVID19

## A Global Issue, Like No Other



# COVID19

## Environmental Linkages

- Ecosystems and zoonotic diseases
- Healthcare and infectious waste management
- Routine waste management and sanitation services in urban settings
- Impact of humanitarian action
- Management of biosphere reserves and national parks
- Negative impacts on climate change action
- Impacts on environmental standards and sustainable development efforts.

### COVID-19 Pandemic: UNEP Emergency Support to Member States and the UN System



The COVID-19 pandemic touches almost all countries on the planet. UN agencies are aligning their work to support Member States to address this unprecedented crisis. While COVID-19 is primarily a health emergency, the response will present both challenges and opportunities for the environment. The key challenges – both immediate and more long term – are outlined below, as is a list of UNEP-led crisis management services that are offered on demand to support Member States, the UN system and other partners to address the environmental dimensions of the pandemic and its socio-economic impacts.

#### Key environmental challenges related to COVID-19

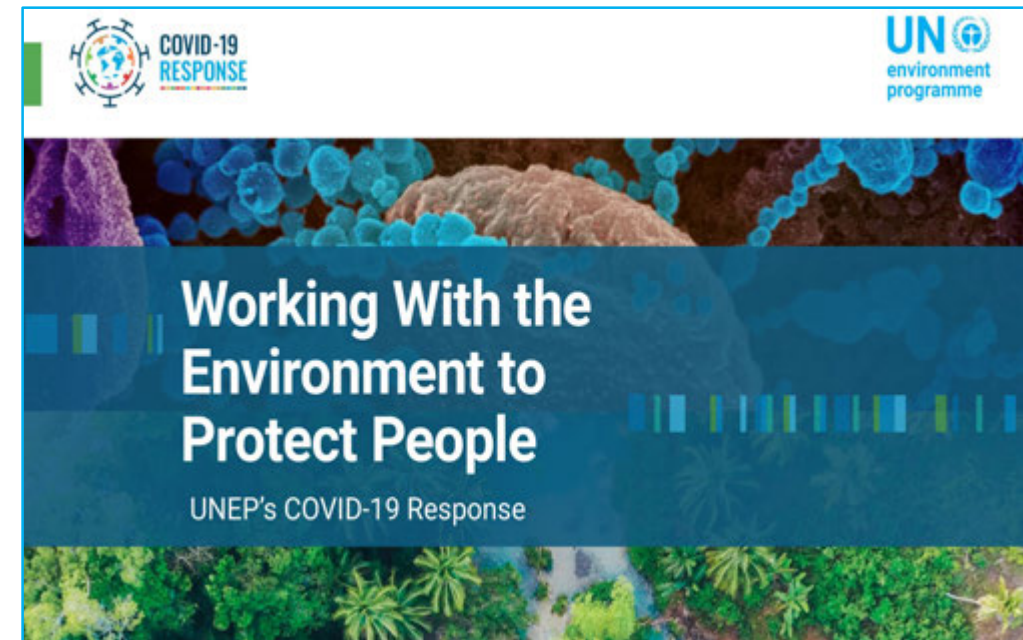
The COVID-19 pandemic, and associated lockdowns, pose several environmental challenges and opportunities to national and local authorities at different stages, ranging from crisis management to recovery:

1. **Ensuring sound management of infectious waste:** How to manage and dispose safely of the waste produced by COVID-19 patients in hospitals, healthcare facilities or at home.
2. **Maintaining sound waste management and sanitation services in urban settings:** How to mitigate the risk of an overall decline in the quality of urban services – including routine waste management and sanitation – due to a possible reduction in revenue for municipal authorities in the recovery phase.
3. **Avoiding negative impacts from humanitarian action:** How to mitigate the environmental risks associated with humanitarian assistance provided to manage COVID-19 outbreaks, including waste management and sanitation issues.
4. **Avoiding unsustainable land conversion:** How to mitigate environmental risks stemming from efforts to increase self-sufficiency in food production in the post-pandemic phase, by converting to agriculture land with a high natural capital – such as national parks, forests and wetlands.
5. **Ensuring continued management of protected natural areas:** How to manage the negative impact of a decline in revenue from tourism (including eco-tourism), reduced national budgets and international development assistance hitherto directed towards maintenance and safeguarding of national parks and other protected natural areas.

# COVID19

## UNEP's Strategy

- **Established a Task force on Preparing a Strategy UNEP's COVID19 Response “Working With the Environment to Protect People”**
- **Four main blocks:**
  1. The medical & humanitarian emergency phase
  2. A transformational change for nature and people
  3. Investing to build back better
  4. Modernizing global environmental governance



# COVID19

## Key Actions

- 01** Increase awareness about the environmental linkages
- 02** Provide guidance on best practices
- 03** Provide real-time support to Member States
- 04** Support COVID19 related needs assessments
- 05** Engage in recovery planning

# COVID19

## Completed so far

### Factsheets:

1. [Zoonotic Diseases](#)
2. [Trade and the Environment](#)
3. [Enhancing Nationally Determined Contributions through Nature-Based Solutions and Resource Efficiency](#)
4. [Global Environmental Governance](#)
5. [Green Jobs](#)
6. [Greening Fiscal Stimulus and Finance Packages to Achieve the SDGs](#)
7. [Waste Management](#)

UNEP Factsheet  
May 2020

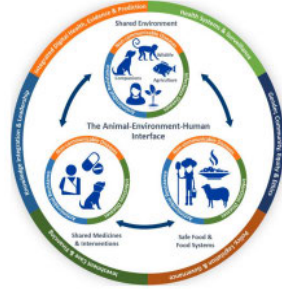
**UN**  
environment  
programme

### Zoonotic Diseases

"Never before have so many opportunities existed for pathogens to pass from wild and domestic animals to people."

**United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP),  
Executive Director, Inger Andersen**

Unless we act to protect habitat and biodiversity loss, says United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) Executive Director, Inger Andersen, pandemics could become a new normal in this century. In response, UNEP is seeking to complement the work of its partners to advance a One Health approach that links the health of people, agricultural systems and nature, to explore how the deterioration of the world's ecosystems is fueling the rise of zoonotic disease pandemics; and to offer practical recommendations to de-escalate this risk.



**COVID-19 and Zoonotic Diseases**  
75 per cent of all emerging infectious diseases have come from wildlife. And while the science is not yet conclusive as to the origin, it seems likely that COVID-19 originated from human-wildlife transmission and has since spread to nearly all countries in the world. But this should not surprise us. Middle East respiratory syndrome (MERS) was transmitted from camels to humans in 2012, and viruses ranging from Avian Flu to Ebola all have their sources in wildlife to human transmission. As more and more people encroach and shrink remaining natural areas, and as the process of urbanization moves us ever closer to wildlife, we increase our potential exposure to disease-causing pathogens. Unless we rethink our relationship to nature, zoonotic pandemics could be repeated, again and again.

**UNEP's Response**

Zoonotic disease transmission is a global, regional and local challenge, so solutions must be context specific. There is no one-size-fits-all. Given this, UNEP will support targeted, site-specific strategies to reduce the threat of such diseases by considering the impacts on equity, indigenous communities and vulnerable groups. This will take the form of three key interventions:

**COVID-19 WASTE MANAGEMENT FACTSHEET**  
From Secretary-General António Guterres' 2020 Report to the Security Council and the General Assembly  
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### 1 Introduction to COVID-19 waste management

**NO UNCONTROLLED DUMPING,  
NO OPEN BURNING**  
Protect the environment and our health

For more information visit [unep.org](http://unep.org) or contact **Kevin Heags** (Head, SEP Unit, Chemicals and Health Branch, UNEP) [kevin.heags@unep.org](mailto:kevin.heags@unep.org)

"Our response is to support Member States in addressing immediate challenges from the medical emergency such as strengthening waste management systems."  
Inger Andersen, UNEP Director

#### The problem




In response to COVID-19, hospitals, health-care facilities and individuals are producing more waste than usual, including masks, gloves, gowns and other protective equipment that could be infected with the virus. There is also a large increase in the amount of single-use plastics being produced.

When not managed safely, infected medical waste could be subject to uncontrolled dumping, leading to public health risks, and to open burning or uncontrolled incineration, leading to the release of toxins to the environment and to secondary transmission of diseases to humans. Other wastes can reach water sources and add to marine and marine pollution.

These practices do not respect WHO guidelines on treatment of infectious and sharp waste from health-care facilities, nor the requirements of the [Basel, Rotterdam and Stockholm Conventions](#) protecting human health and the environment from hazardous chemicals and wastes!

#### The challenge

Wherever possible, countries should control COVID-19 waste through maximizing the use of available waste management solutions and, at the same time, look to avoid any potential long-term impacts on the environment. To do so, they need to:



1 Manage increased waste production by maximizing the use of existing facilities.

2 Ensure the operations follow the emissions requirements and to avoid secondary health impacts.

3 In the absence of appropriate technology, consider adopting the 3S methodology and installation of temporary/stop-gap solutions.

1/2

# COVID19

Completed so far

## Webinars

- Global Webinar on “COVID19 Linked Waste Management”
  - **1300 participants, 125 countries**
- Asia Pacific Webinar on “COVID19 Linked Waste Management”
  - **450 participants, 46 countries**
- Global Webinar “COVID19 and Environmental Emergencies”
  - **1500 participants, 135 countries**

**WEBINAR: WASTE MANAGEMENT DURING COVID-19 PANDEMIC** UN environment programme



Photo: Simon Dwyer, DFID

**June 18**  
15:00 - 16:30 CEST



While COVID-19 is primarily a global health emergency, its impacts have been unprecedented on a wide spectrum of sectors, from the economy to education. The environmental sector is no exception. One of the most pronounced and specific environmental impacts of the COVID-19 crisis is the challenge of healthcare and infectious waste management.

Hospitals handling COVID-19 cases generate waste which are potentially infectious, from materials used in patient care to the personal protective equipment used by the healthcare personnel. Medical facilities with proper waste disposal facilities, need only additional training for the waste handlers. However, in areas without environmentally adequate waste management solutions, locally appropriate solutions will need to be found.

In many countries, tens of thousands of people are involved in waste picking activities and the market for recycled goods has crashed. The COVID-19 situation has impacted livelihoods of waste pickers and increased stigma of their jobs. Therefore, this sector will also need special attention.

The UN Environment Programme and its experts will be delivering a webinar in order to increase awareness and provide guidance on the issue of waste management during the COVID-19 crisis. Participants of the webinar will also have access to additional reference materials and guidance.



**Agenda**

|       |   |
|-------|---|
| 15:00 | Opening Remarks<br>Gory Lewis                                 |
| 15:05 | Management of Healthcare Waste During COVID19<br>Martin Guard |
| 15:25 | Impact on the Informal Sector<br>Mike Cowling                 |
| 15:45 | Questions and Answers   |
| 16:25 | Closing Remarks   |
| 16:30 | End of Webinar  |

**Register here:**  
<https://bit.ly/3dVTUeV>

# COVID19

## Direct support to countries

- **Technical Advice**
  - Afghanistan, Sudan, South Sudan, Haiti
- **Corona Linked Assessments**
  - South Africa, Serbia, Suriname, Trinidad and Tobago, India, Haiti, Sudan
- **Recovery Planning**
  - South Africa
- **COVID19 Support to UN Peacekeeping Operations**





# COVID19

## Planned Actions

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- **More Awareness and Capacity Building Efforts**
  - Africa, Latin America and Caribbean, Middle East, Country specific, in local languages
- **Corona Linked Assessments**
  - Philippines, Mauritius, Ecuador, Azerbaijan, Cape Verde, El Salvador+
- **Technical Assistance and other support**
  - Afghanistan, India, Haiti, Nigeria, South Sudan, Sudan+

# Thank you



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