



# What we are learning from COVID-19

COVID-19 is the greatest global shock in decades. Hundreds of thousands of lives have been lost, and the world's economy likely faces the worst recession since the 1930s. The resulting loss of employment and income will cause further damage to livelihoods, health, and sustainable development.

Societies need to protect themselves, and to recover, as quickly as possible. But we cannot go back to the way we did things before. Increasing numbers of infectious diseases, including HIV/AIDS, SARS and Ebola, have made the jump from wildlife to humans – and all available evidence suggests that COVID-19 has followed the same route. Once human-to-human transmission of COVID-19 began, national and international surveillance and response systems were not strong or fast enough to completely halt transmission. And as infections spread, a lack of universal health coverage has left billions of people, including many in rich countries, without reliable and affordable access to medical treatment. Massive inequalities have meant that deaths and loss of livelihoods have been strongly driven by socioeconomic status, often compounded by gender and minority status.

Attempting to save money by neglecting environmental protection, emergency preparedness, health systems, and social safety nets, has proven to be a false economy – and the bill is now being paid many times over. The world cannot afford repeated disasters on the scale of COVID-19, whether they are triggered by the next pandemic, or from mounting environmental damage and climate change. Going back to “normal” is not good enough.




# What we are learning from COVID-19 (*cont.*)

In adversity, the crisis has also brought out some of the best in our societies, from solidarity among neighbours, to the bravery of health and other key workers in facing down risks to their own health to serve their communities, to countries working together to provide emergency relief or to research treatments and vaccines. The “lockdown” measures that have been necessary to control the spread of COVID-19 have slowed economic activity, and disrupted lives – but have also given some glimpses of a possible brighter future. In some places, pollution levels have dropped to such an extent that people have breathed clean air, or have seen blue skies and clear waters, or have been able to walk and cycle safely with their children – for the first times in their lives. The use of digital technology has accelerated new ways of working and connecting with each other, from reducing time spent commuting, to more flexible ways of studying, to carrying out medical consultations remotely, to spending more time with our families. Opinion polls from around the world show that people want to protect the environment, and preserve the positives that have emerged from the crisis, as we recover.

National governments are now committing trillions of dollars, in a matter of weeks, to maintain and eventually resuscitate economy activity. These investments are essential to safeguard people’s livelihoods, and therefore their health. But the allocation of these investments, and the policy decisions that will guide both short- and long-term recovery, have the potential to shape the way we live our lives, work and consume for years to come. Nowhere is this more important than in their effects on environmental degradation and pollution, and particularly on the greenhouse gas emissions that are driving global warming and the climate crisis.

Decisions made in the coming months can either “lock in” economic development patterns that will do permanent and escalating damage to the ecological systems that sustain all human health and livelihoods, or, if wisely taken, can promote a healthier, fairer, and greener world.





# Prescriptions and Actionables for a healthy recovery from COVID-19

The following WHO prescriptions and accompanied actionables are practical steps for implementing the WHO Manifesto for a healthy recovery from COVID-19. They aim at creating a healthier, fairer and greener world while investing to maintain and resuscitate the economy hit by the effects of COVID-19.

Policy makers, national and local decision-makers and a wide array of other actors wishing to contribute to a healthy recovery can now take decisive steps by shaping the way we live, work and consume. Effects on environmental degradation and pollution and climate change will be wide ranging. WHO and partner organizations have since long been developing substantive guidance and provide support for building healthier environments for healthier populations.

Six WHO prescriptions, and a comprehensive set of key actionables, for achieving healthier environments is provided accordingly. Their prioritization will depend upon the local context and situation. New investments and reconsideration of priorities in the context of recovery from COVID-19 present unique opportunities for shaping healthier environments and scaling up actions accordingly.