

## COVID-19 healthcare waste expose urgent need to improve waste management systems: WHO

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**The COVID-19 waste challenge and increasing urgency to address environmental sustainability offer an opportunity to strengthen systems to safely and sustainably reduce and manage health care waste**



Tens of thousands of tonnes of extra medical waste from the response to the COVID-19 pandemic has put tremendous strain on health care waste management systems around the world, threatening human and environmental health and exposing a dire need to improve waste management practices, according to a new report by the World Health Organisation (WHO).

As the United Nations (UN) and countries grappled with the immediate task of securing and quality-assuring supplies of personal protective equipment (PPE), less attention and resources were devoted to the safe and sustainable management of COVID-19 related health care waste.

Today, 30% of healthcare facilities (60% in the least developed countries) are not equipped to handle existing waste loads, let alone the additional COVID-19 load. The report lays out a set of recommendations for integrating better, safer, and more environmentally sustainable waste practices into the current COVID-19 response and future pandemic preparedness efforts.

Recommendations include using eco-friendly packaging and shipping, safe and reusable PPE (e.g., gloves and medical masks), recyclable or biodegradable materials; investment in non-burn waste treatment technologies, such as autoclaves; reverse logistics to support centralized treatment and investments in the recycling sector to ensure materials, like plastics.