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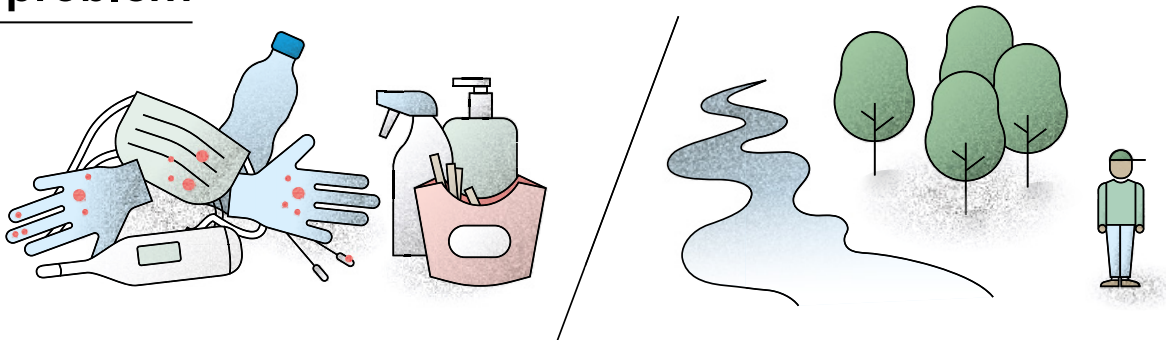
Links to Circularity – Non-healthcare waste

**NO UNCONTROLLED DUMPING,
NO OPEN BURNING**

Protect the environment and our health

For more information visit unep.org or contact **Kevin Helps** (Head, GEF Unit, Chemicals and Health Branch, UNEP) kevin.helps@un.org

The problem



COVID-19 will lead to a greater production and consumption of household and personal health related products. These products can include: personal protection equipment and products (gloves, masks), electronic equipment (thermometers), sanitization and cleaning products (cleaning clothes and wipes, detergents, sanitizers etc.). Most of these products are single-use and contain valuable resources like plastics, textiles, metals, electronics.

The consumption of these single-use products will be intensified due to the consideration of hygiene and convenience of use, such as single-use gloves, masks, disinfection wipes and tissues. This may also extend to other aspects of a fast-adapting lifestyle, such as switching back to using single-use shopping bags, packaging from on-line delivery of foods and household goods, etc.

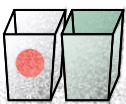
As countries go on lock-down, people are encouraged to buy products for storage and use over time. Most of these long lasting items are packaged in plastics: if improperly disposed of, they will increase the amount of plastic waste generated, and potentially pollute land and marine environment.

COVID-19 waste must be collected and treated adequately to avoid littering or uncontrolled incineration causing impacts to human health, ecosystem quality, biodiversity, including impacts on soil, rivers, coastal lines and in the marine system.

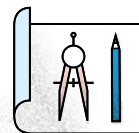
For more information, check the factsheet on household waste.

Guidance

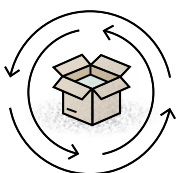
Key opportunities to improve the circularity of household waste to respond to COVID-19:



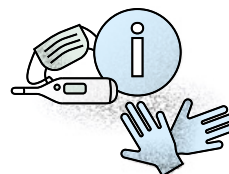
Have segregation, separation, recycling and disposal systems in place to improve the collection and recycling efficiency of household waste with medical products or hygiene products with potential infection of the virus. Follow [WHO guidance](#), [UNEP IETC](#) and the Secretariat of the [Stockholm Convention](#) guidance.



Innovate and re-design household products to improve the durability, reusability, repairability and recyclability while ensuring safe use, with a specific focus on current single-use products.



Implement measures to increase the circularity of COVID-19 related products and value chains, from product and system innovation, to the 4R (**Reduce, Reuse, Recycle, Recover**). The measures will create enabling conditions to enhance the sustainability and resilience of the local and global supply chain, and to improve the working and employment conditions for formal and informal workers.

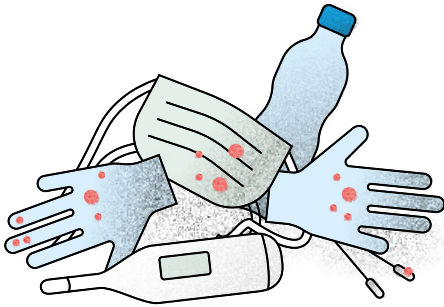


Enhance sustainability information on household products, on how to use them soundly, extend their lifetime and handle their disposal phase. Make sure reusable products at home are used with proper sanitization measures: reusable gloves, masks etc.



Develop clear certifications of products and equipment, as a guiding reference to individual and institutional purchase decisions.

Facts



After the outbreak of COVID-19, the Government of UK suspended the single-use carrier bag charge for all grocery deliveries ordered online in England. The Department of Environment, Food, and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) revealed that its ban on plastic straws and stirrers had been delayed until October 2020. ([Link](#))

In the United States, Oregon's ban on single-use plastic bags, which went into effect on Jan. 1, 2020, has been temporarily lifted. Massachusetts and Illinois have also asked citizens to halt their use of reusable bags. In cities such as San Francisco and Albuquerque, shoppers are also barred from using reusable bags. ([Link](#))

Through its operations and guidelines, such as the series of COVID-19 Factsheets, UNEP goal is to support countries facing the large increase in waste volumes caused, directly or indirectly, by the pandemic.

Way forward

To ensure the circularity of household products and new habits of consumers under COVID-19:

Short term:



Prioritise collection, stockpile and recycling of the waste products (where applicable, for uncontaminated waste streams) arising from COVID-19. For the wastes that are potentially contaminated by the virus, they need to be separately collected from the municipal waste. Due to fast arising quantities, it is better to temporarily stockpile them, before a comprehensive solution for disinfection, material recycling and recover, and final disposal is available in the country.



Provide practical guidance to consumers and citizens on how to reduce the consumption of single-use products, while educating on sustainable solutions/alternatives and on the best disposal approaches.

Mid-term and long-term:



Developing standards and eco-labels to provide better product and consumer information.



Organize awareness raising activities to encourage more sustainable lifestyles, including the preference for reusable products.



Design new products and business models with improved reusability, repairability, and recyclability.

“For far too long economic growth has come at the expense of a wasteful and invisible reliance on our natural resources. A circular economy is our best chance of living within planetary boundaries. In reducing, re-using and re-designing how we create value from products and services, we have a tremendous opportunity to tap into a more inclusive and prosperous future for all.”

Inger Andersen, UNEP Executive Director