

# UN, SA collaborate in creating Covid-19 waste awareness

The United Nations Environmental Programme, in driving awareness of how to stop the spread of Covid-19 through responsible, considerate waste disposal practices, is partnering with South Africa's Department of Health (Environmental Unit); Department of Forestry, Fishery and Environment; Packaging SA; Plastics SA; SA Waste Pickers Association; Sustainable Seas Trust (SST); and the Wildlife and Environmental Society of South Africa (WESSA).



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“At this critical time, more than ever, I would like to underscore that improper management of healthcare waste poses serious harm to the environment and human health. The United Nations in South Africa is committed to working with partners to strengthen communities in the sound management and safe disposal of hazardous medical and sanitary waste,” said United Nations resident coordinator for South Africa, Nardo Bekele-Thomas.

“The risk of disease transmission is higher due to exposure to infectious agents among waste pickers, waste workers, health workers, patients, and the community in general.”

## Routes of transmission

According to the World Health Organisation, the main routes of transmission are respiratory droplets and direct contact; but the immediate environment of an infected individual can also serve as a source of transmission as droplets may land on surfaces or objects where the virus could remain infectious.

“Everyone must become aware of the need to protect municipal waste collectors, waste-pickers or even curious individuals who might open bins and bags that might contain virus-infected material from homes and offices. By keeping bags of waste sealed safely aside, for at least three days, could reduce the possibility of further contamination,” said Cecilia Kinuthia-Njenga, head of the UNEP office in South Africa.

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