



Global Handwashing Day

October 15th 2009 will mark the second Global Handwashing Day. This annual event started last year, as an initiative to advocate for and promote handwashing with soap in order to decrease the transmission of infectious diseases. Although people all over the world wash their hands with water, very few wash with soap at critical times.

The Background

Hygiene promotion is a powerful intervention for improving health in developing countries. Handwashing with soap significantly reduces the risk of diarrhoea, which is the biggest killer of children under the age of 5 in the developing world. One study indicated that handwashing with soap at key times could prevent approximately one million deaths a year from diarrhea (1). Handwashing can also help to prevent transmission of respiratory infections, which also pose a great danger to young children in the developing world (2). In addition to this, handwashing with soap has been ranked the most cost-effective intervention for the worldwide control of disease (3, 4). In developed countries, handwashing can also prevent the spread of infections, including hospital-acquired infections. Despite all the evidence showing that handwashing could have a great impact on global health, too little funding and attention is given to hygiene promotion.

As children are most at risk of dying from infectious diseases such as diarrhea and respiratory infections, the school child is the primary focus for Global Handwashing Day. The task is then to turn handwashing into a habit which they will continue to practice throughout their lives.

Who is involved?

The Public-Private Partnership for Handwashing with Soap instigated Global Handwashing Day as a means of raising the profile of handwashing on the public health and developmental agenda. However, the day is supported and implemented by a wide array of governments, international institutions, civil society organizations, NGOs, private companies and individuals around the world. Each country has a convening institution, which brings together other organisations in the country with an interest in handwashing, and coordinates the activities in that country. The convening institution in the UK is the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine.

Global Handwashing Day in 2008

In 2008, activities took place in 73 countries across Africa, Asia, Europe and the Americas. Some of the highlights include:

- Cambodia worked with schools and ran educational activities about handwashing. Other activities include a TV quiz show about good hygiene for primary school students with four teams from four schools in Phnom Penh participating.
- Reaching 75,000 schools across Bangladesh for a Guinness World Record attempt. All five national TV channels, 26 national newspapers plus regional publications covered Global Handwashing Day.
- In Yemen, a mobile network provider sent handwashing SMS to one million customers.
- In Madagascar, 19,300 primary schools participated in a week-long event. Handwashing activities involving schools and the community culminated on October 15th with 3.5 million children washing hands with soap at noon. Three Ministries issued a joint statement to the Prime Minister to make Global Handwashing Day an official event.

Activities in the UK for 2009

The main activity on the day will be the Golden Poo Awards – an animated film competition on the theme of hygiene and sanitation, with additional awards for Hygiene Champion and Sanitation Champion, to recognise those who have made a difference in these fields. For details, go to www.thegoldenpooawards.org.

We have brought together various resources and activities for schools, including e-Bug lesson plans on hand hygiene, and an assembly plan prepared by WaterAid. There will also be a link up between schools in London and Malawi, organised by PumpAid.

We will be sampling the bacteria found on children's hands and compare levels of faecal bacteria found between age groups, and between girls and boys. We will also be investigating their views on handwashing and about germs and disease transmission.

For more information about Global Handwashing Day and hygiene promotion in developing countries, go to:

<http://globalhandwashingday.org>
<http://www.hygienecentral.org.uk>
www.globalhandwashingday.org.uk

or contact globalhandwashingday@lshtm.ac.uk if you want to get involved in Global Handwashing Day in the UK.

1. Curtis V, Cairncross S. Effect of washing hands with soap on diarrhoea risk in the community: a systematic review. *Lancet Infect Dis* 2003;3(5):275-81.
2. Rabie T, Curtis V. Handwashing and risk of respiratory infections: a quantitative systematic review. *Trop Med Int Health* 2006;11(3):258-67.

3. Jamieson D, Bremen J, Measham A, Alleyne G, Claeson M. Disease Control Priorities in Developing Countries. Oxford: Oxford University Press; 2006.
4. Borghi J, Guinness L, Ouedraogo J, Curtis V. Is hygiene promotion cost-effective? A case study in Burkina Faso. *Tropical Medicine & International Health* 2002;7(11):960-969.