

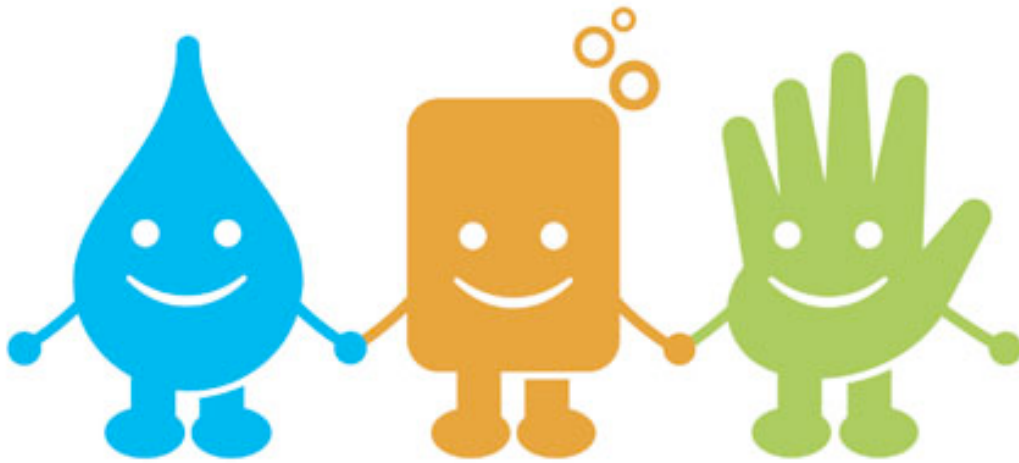


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UN stresses effectiveness of handwashing with soap to prevent diseases



Global Handwashing Day October 15

14 October 2011 –

The United Nations today reminded people across the world that simply washing hands with soap and water remains the most cost-effective way to prevent diseases, and urged everyone to motivate others, especially children who are easily infected by disease-carrying germs present in dirty hands, to make it a habit.

On Global Handwashing Day, to be observed on Saturday, the UN Children's Fund ([UNICEF](#)) has organized events to inspire millions to lather up to prevent life-threatening diseases such as diarrhoea and acute respiratory infections.

In Afghanistan, 1.7 million children from 1,700 schools will wash hands, as will 326,809 Eritrean children in 1,272 schools, as part of awareness-raising exercises. In Peru, the

Government declared a national handwashing week beginning 10 October, with activities involving 3.5 million pupils in 20,000 schools. Washing hands with soap prevents infections in a more straightforward and cost-effective way than any single vaccine, the agency stressed.

Eight million children in the Indian state of Rajasthan and over 1 million children in Pakistan will also participate in handwashing events.

This year's activities are expected to surpass celebrations in 2010, when 200 million people and 700,000 schools in over 70 countries marked the day. The events are aimed at spreading a life-saving message – clean hands save lives.

UNICEF estimates that diarrhoea kills 1.1 million children every year, and pneumonia-related illnesses take another 1.2 million child lives. Washing hands with soap prevents infections in a more straightforward and cost-effective way than any single vaccine, the agency stressed.

Washing hands with soap at critical moments, such as after using the toilet or before handling food, is an easy and affordable intervention that can reduce the incidence of diarrhoea among children under the age of five by almost 50 per cent, and cut respiratory infections by as much as 25 per cent, according to UNICEF.

“Soap is not in short supply, even in developing countries,” said Therese Dooley, UNICEF's Senior Adviser for Hygiene and Sanitation. “The vast majority of poor households have soap in the home. The problem is that soap is used for laundry or bathing, but rarely for handwashing.”

Governments around the world have adopted Global Handwashing Day as a national event. Last year, for example, all schools – 18 million children – across Bangladesh, participated in mass handwashing demonstrations.

The events were used as a platform to launch the Bangladeshi Government's National Hygiene Campaign, which aims to change the way the country uses soap and promote its use in handwashing.

“We are happy that this year other countries are following Bangladesh's example,” said Ms. Dooley. “While we adults are always trying to discourage bad habits in children, the good habit of handwashing with soap is one we want every child to develop.”

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[UN-backed Handwashing Day: soap and water saves millions of lives](#)

