



HOME HYGIENE: A FUNDAMENTAL ALLY IN REDUCING INFECTIOUS DISEASE

The International Scientific Forum on Home Hygiene (IFH) and the Water Supply and Sanitation Collaborative Council (WSSCC) are working to raise awareness of the importance of hygiene and to develop programmes aimed at improving hygiene practice at home and at the community level

HOME HYGIENE: A FUNDAMENTAL ALLY

WHY HYGIENE?

Hygiene-related illness costs developing countries five billion working days a year.

In developing countries approximately 1.7 million deaths per year are attributable to unsafe water, sanitation and hygiene. For decades, universal access to water and sanitation has been seen as the essential step in reducing the preventable disease burden, but it is now clear that substantial reductions in diarrhoeal diseases are best achieved by programmes that integrate **hygiene promotion** with improvement in **water quality and availability, and sanitation**.

NOT JUST ONE REASON FOR HYGIENE...

Hygiene promotion is important, and not only as the means to reduce diarrhoeal diseases amongst the poorest communities: promoting good hygiene practice to families right **across the social spectrum** is a key factor in **reducing the overall global burden** of infectious disease.

This is because, for example:

- Viruses are responsible for many respiratory as well as diarrhoeal diseases. Since viral infections are not treatable by antibiotics, prevention strategies including hygiene promotion are the key.
- Good hygiene can reduce antibiotic resistance by reducing the need for antibiotic prescribing.
- Trachoma is the world's leading cause of preventable blindness. Face washing breaks the cycle of infection.

- Hygiene is a key first line defence in preventing the spread of new pathogens and new strains of existing pathogens such as SARS and Avian Flu.
- The proportion of the global population who have reduced resistance to infection is increasing. This includes the newborn, the elderly, and family members with underlying illness (such as diabetes or HIV/AIDS), or who are taking immunosuppressive drugs.

HYGIENE IS MORE THAN HANDWASHING!

Safe faeces disposal, handwashing and ensuring safe household water are the most important actions for preventing diarrhoeal disease, but all activities contribute to reducing the total burden of infectious disease in the community.

Home hygiene comprises all the activities we need to undertake in our home and immediate surroundings to reduce the spread of infection:

- Handwashing.
- Safe disposal of faeces.
- Household water treatment and safe storage (HWTS).
- Food, personal and general hygiene.
- Safe disposal of waste and control of wastewater and rainwater.
- Care of domestic animals and pets, and control of insects.
- Care of family members at increased risk of infection.

IN REDUCING INFECTIOUS DISEASE

HOW DO WE PROMOTE HYGIENE?

If hygiene promotion is to be effective, three main factors need to be addressed.

1. The family is the cornerstone:

We need to look at effective hygiene promotion from the point of view of the family, and the range of actions which they need to undertake in order to protect themselves from infectious disease.

2. Building infrastructure for hygiene promotion:

The separate aspects of hygiene are often dealt with by separate agencies, leading to families receiving fragmented, and sometimes even conflicting, hygiene advice. Effective hygiene promotion requires a lead agency in each country, and proper infrastructure at national, district and local level for actioning hygiene promotion.

3. Building capacity for hygiene promotion at the local level:

Hygiene must be a shared responsibility. To achieve this, there is a need to build capacity for hygiene promotion at the local level. Community workers who understand their community are best placed to develop hygiene programmes.

The cost of a hygiene education programme that reaches 50% of households is 0.5-1.5% of annual spending on health care in most of the developing world.

'HOME HYGIENE IN DEVELOPING COUNTRIES: PREVENTION OF INFECTION IN THE HOME AND PERI-DOMESTIC SETTING'

As part of their remit to increase awareness of the importance of hygiene and promote hygiene practice, the IFH with support from the WSSCC has produced a teaching/self-learning resource on hygiene in developing country situations.

The resource covers all aspects of home and peri-domestic hygiene, and has been written in simple language in order to be understood by workers from a diverse range of backgrounds, who may have limited scientific or medical knowledge.

This training resource is intended primarily to give practical support to community workers and teachers at the local level who have responsibility for developing school and community hygiene promotion programmes, but can be used by anyone who needs to obtain an overview of hygiene and hygiene practice.

The Resource Guide can be freely downloaded from the IFH and WSSCC websites, or can be obtained on request from the IFH or WSSCC Secretariats.

ABOUT THE IFH

The IFH is a non-profit, non-government organisation comprising scientists and healthcare professionals who play an active role in hygiene policy and scientific research. Through its international initiatives the IFH is working to raise awareness of the fundamental role that home hygiene plays in preventing infectious disease, and to develop and promote hygiene and hygiene practice based on sound scientific principles.

INTERNATIONAL SCIENTIFIC FORUM ON HOME HYGIENE

Morningside,
Willow Green Lane, Little Leigh,
Northwich, CW8 4RB, UK
Email: secretariat@ifh-homehygiene.org
Website: www.ifh-homehygiene.org



www.ifh-homehygiene.org

ABOUT THE WSSCC

The WSSCC, existing under a mandate from the United Nations, seeks to accelerate the achievement of sustainable sanitation, hygiene and water services to all people. It aspires to achieve this mission through advocacy and awareness-raising campaigns, and facilitating concerted action programmes focused at improved sanitation and hygiene service delivery.

WATER SUPPLY AND SANITATION COLLABORATIVE COUNCIL

International Environment House,
9 Chemin des Anémones,
1219 Châtelaine, Geneva, Switzerland
Tel: +41 22 917 8657
Fax: +41 22 917 8084
Email: wsscc@who.int
Website: www.wash-cc.org

