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**IFH Newsheet July 2021**

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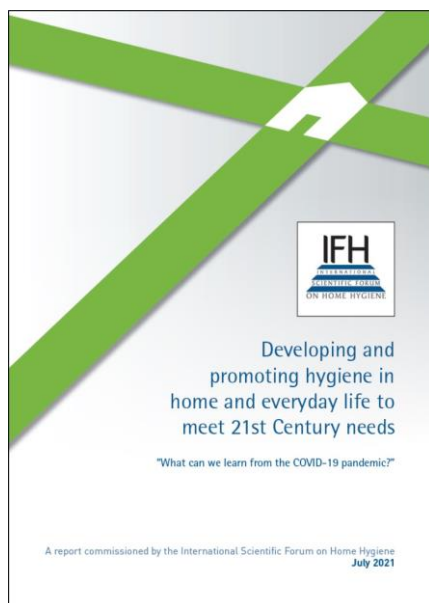
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## Developing and promoting hygiene in home and everyday life to meet 21<sup>st</sup> Century needs; what can we learn from the COVID-19 pandemic?



Back in 2018 IFH published a White Paper summarizing why hygiene in home and everyday life (HEDL) is important and what needs to be done to ensure it is fully recognised as a vital part of public health. An issue highlighted in the report was the growing threat from a global pandemic where public hygiene behaviour would be the vital first line of defence to mitigate spread before measures such as vaccines and antimicrobials became available.

In light of recent events, IFH has prepared this [revised 2021 white paper](#), in collaboration with a group of 18 global experts, to explore what needs to be learned from the COVID-19 pandemic – and importantly the urgent action that is needed. As stated in [the 2018 paper](#), in the past, HEDL hygiene has tended to be considered less important than infection prevention and control in health facilities. Hopefully, the COVID-19 pandemic will refocus the attention of politicians, healthcare professionals, academics and others on the vital role of public hygiene understanding and hygiene behaviour. We need to recognise the next pandemic, the spread of antimicrobial resistance (AMR), is already underway. Public hygiene behaviour has a major, but hitherto under-recognised, role to play, by driving down infection rates and the associated need for antimicrobial use, the main driver of AMR.

This report is constructive and pragmatic, providing a framework for workable solutions. It centres around our understanding of how a risk management approach (Targeted Hygiene) provides the means to develop strategy which is effective in addressing the hygiene issues we currently face, including sustainable use of the resources needed to perform hygiene practices.

This report also includes findings of a new study on public understanding of hygiene carried out in 23 European countries. The poll indicates the public is confused about what hygiene means and how it differs from cleanliness.

This report sets out calls to action to the many stakeholder groups including scientists, healthcare professionals, environmentalists, the media etc to work together to achieve change. It is only by working together that we will be able to achieve the health benefits hygiene in home and everyday life offers.

**As hygiene stakeholders - we would welcome your [comments & suggestions](#)**

#### **The major findings of the report are:**

- **Hygiene in our homes and everyday lives (HEDL) is of paramount importance** but needs to be better recognised by national and international policy makers as an equal partner with infection prevention in healthcare and other settings, and given a more equal allocation of resources.
- **If hygiene in HEDL is to be effective, it needs an approach appropriate to the issues we currently face.** Targeted Hygiene provides a framework for developing hygiene that is effective and also addresses sustainability and other issues. However, work is needed, using new scientific methods, to develop this approach and estimate its effectiveness in reducing infection risks.

- **Lack of a unified voice advocating for HEDL hygiene means other health issues can be regarded as more important.** Targeted Hygiene provides a framework for addressing these issues including sustainable use of resources (chemicals, energy, microbicides), minimizing environmental impacts, and adverse effects that cleaning and cleaning agents might have on human interaction with essential microbes.
- **Achieving the benefits of Targeted Hygiene depends on getting the public to understand this approach.** Misunderstandings and myths around hygiene and cleanliness are currently undermining hygiene behaviour change strategies. To achieve change we need to further explore cognitive influences on hygiene understanding and behaviour, and better understand the drivers for behaviour change. Only by incorporating these learnings into hygiene promotion strategies will we be able to realise the health benefits that Targeted Hygiene can deliver.

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