

What is hygiene?

For health expert of a health benefit. These are: handwashing with soap (HWWS), the removal of stools from the household environment and the home treatment of drinking water (see box). The neglect of other practices such as the unsafe disposal of children's stools and the unsafe handling of weaning food can cause health problems in some settings, but has had less attention.

Box 1. Hygiene practices help prevent diarrhoea

Handwashing with soap and water after contact with faecal material can reduce diarrhoeal diseases by 35% or more.

Curtis & Cairncross, 2003

Using a pit latrine, including for the disposal of children's faeces can reduce diarrhoea incidence by 36% or more.

Esrey et al, 1991; Fewtrell et al, 2005

Improving the quality of water at the household level can reduce risk of diarrhoea by 35%

Fewtrell et al, 2005

Hygiene promotion: the scale of the problem

Hygiene promotion is an essential component of water and sanitation programmes. Reductions in diarrhoeal diseases mostly accrue from the improved hygiene practices that improvements in sanitation and water facilities permit (Cairncross & Feachem, 1993). Hygiene promotion can also improve health in the absence of improved facilities (Luby et al, 2004).

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- The prevalence of HWWS after defecation is 1% in urban Burkina Faso, 18% in rural Kyrgyzstan, and 34% in Kerala, India; 12% were observed to wash hands after defecation in a Lima shanty town, with the use of soap rare.
 - HWWS after cleaning up a child who had defecated has been found to occur on less than 1% of occasions in rural Kyrgyzstan, 9.9% in rural Nigeria, 16% in childcare centres in Brazil and 47% in households in Northern England. (Scott et al, 2003).

Lessons from marketing and private industry

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