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Why it is important to share
and act on information
about



Hygiene

More than half of all illnesses and deaths among young children are caused by germs that get into their mouths through food or water or dirty hands. Many of these germs come from human and animal faeces.

Many illnesses, especially diarrhoea, can be prevented by good hygiene practices: putting all faeces in a toilet or latrine; washing hands with soap and water or ash and water after defecating or handling children's faeces, and before feeding children or touching food; and ensuring that animal faeces are kept away from the house, paths, wells and children's play areas.

Everyone in the community needs to work together to build and use toilets and latrines, protect water sources, and safely dispose of waste water and garbage. It is important for governments to support communities by providing information on low-cost latrines and toilet facilities that all families can afford. In urban areas, government support is needed for low-cost sanitation and drainage systems, improved drinking water supply, and garbage collection.



Key Messages:

What every family and community has a right to know about

Hygiene

1. All faeces should be disposed of safely. Using a toilet or latrine is the best way.
2. All family members, including children, need to wash their hands thoroughly with soap and water or ash and water after contact with faeces, before touching food, and before feeding children.
3. Washing the face with soap and water every day helps to prevent eye infections. In some parts of the world, eye infections can lead to trachoma, which can cause blindness.
4. Only use water that is from a safe source or is purified. Water containers need to be kept covered to keep the water clean.





5. Raw or leftover food can be dangerous. Raw food should be washed or cooked. Cooked food should be eaten without delay or thoroughly reheated.
6. Food, utensils and food preparation surfaces should be kept clean. Food should be stored in covered containers.
7. Safe disposal of all household refuse helps prevent illness.





Supporting Information

Hygiene

1. All faeces should be disposed of safely. Using a toilet or latrine is the best way.

Many illnesses, especially diarrhoea, come from germs found in human faeces. If the germs get into water or onto food, hands, utensils or surfaces used for preparing and serving food, they can be swallowed and cause illness.

The single most important action to prevent the spread of germs is to dispose of all faeces – both human and animal – safely. Human faeces need to be put down a toilet or latrine. The latrine needs to be kept clean. Animal faeces need to be kept away from the house, paths and areas where children play.

If it is not possible to use a toilet or latrine, everyone should always defecate well away from houses, paths, water sources and places where children play. The faeces should be buried immediately.

All faeces, even those of infants, carry germs and are therefore dangerous. If children defecate without using a toilet, latrine or potty, their faeces should be cleaned up immediately and put down the latrine or buried.

Latrines and toilets need to be cleaned frequently. Latrines should be kept covered and toilets should be flushed.

Local governments and NGOs often can help communities build sanitary latrines by giving advice on the design and construction of low-cost latrines.

2. All family members, including children, need to wash their hands thoroughly with soap and water or ash and water after contact with faeces, before touching food, and before feeding children.

Washing the hands with soap and water or ash and water removes germs. Rinsing the fingers with water is not enough – both hands need to be rubbed with soap or ash. This helps to stop germs and dirt from getting onto food or into the mouth. Washing the hands can also prevent infection with worms. Soap and water or ash and water should be placed conveniently near the latrine or toilet.

- It is especially important to wash the hands after defecating and after cleaning the bottom of a baby or child who has just defecated. It is also important to wash hands after handling animals and raw foods.
- Hands should always be washed before preparing, serving or eating food, and before feeding children. Children should be taught to wash both hands after defecating and before eating to help protect them from illness.

Children often put their hands into their mouths, so it is important to wash a child's hands often, especially after they have been playing in dirt or with animals.

Children are easily infected with worms, which deplete the body's nutrients. Worms and their eggs can be found in human and animal faeces and urine, in surface water and soil, and in poorly cooked meat. Children should not play near the latrine, toilet or defecation areas. Shoes should be worn near latrines to prevent worms from entering the body through the skin of the feet.

- Children living in areas where worms are common should be treated two to three times per year with a recommended antihelmenthic medication.



3. Washing the face with soap and water every day helps to prevent eye infections. In some parts of the world, eye infections can lead to trachoma, which can cause blindness.

A dirty face attracts flies, spreading the germs they carry from person to person. The eyes may become sore or infected and vision may be impaired or lost if the eyes are not kept clean and healthy.

If the eyes are healthy, the white part is clear, the eyes are moist and shiny, and vision is sharp. If the eyes are extremely dry or very red and sore, if there is a discharge or if there is difficulty seeing, then the child should be examined by a health worker as soon as possible.

4. Only use water that is from a safe source or is purified. Water containers need to be kept covered to keep the water clean.

Families have fewer illnesses when they have an adequate supply of clean water and know how to keep it free of germs.

If the water is not clean it can be purified by boiling or filtering.

Clean water sources include properly constructed and maintained piped systems, tube-wells, protected dug wells and springs. Water from unsafe sources – such as ponds, rivers, open tanks and step-wells – can be made safer by boiling. Water should be stored in a covered container to keep it clean.

Families and communities can protect their water supply by:

- keeping wells covered and installing a handpump
- disposing of faeces and waste water (especially from latrines and household cleaning) well away from any water source used for cooking, drinking or washing
- building latrines at least 15 metres away and downhill from a water source



- always keeping buckets, ropes and jars used to collect and store water as clean as possible by storing them in a clean place, rather than on the ground
- keeping animals away from drinking water sources and family living areas
- avoiding the use of pesticides or chemicals anywhere near a water source.

Families can keep water clean in the home by:

- storing drinking water in a clean, covered container
- avoid touching clean water with unclean hands
- taking water out of the container with a clean ladle or cup
- having a tap on the water container
- not allowing anyone to put their hands into the container or to drink directly from it
- keeping animals away from stored water.

If there is uncertainty about the safety of the drinking water, local authorities should be consulted.

5. Raw or leftover food can be dangerous. Raw food should be washed or cooked. Cooked food should be eaten without delay or thoroughly reheated.

Cooking food thoroughly kills germs. Food, especially meat and poultry, should be cooked all the way through.

Germs grow quickly in warm food. Food should be eaten as soon as possible after cooking so it does not have time to collect germs.

- If food has to be kept for more than two hours, it should be kept either very hot or very cool.
- If cooked food is saved for another meal, it should be covered to keep off flies and insects and then thoroughly reheated before being eaten.



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- Yogurt and sour porridge are good to use in meals because their acid prevents the growth of germs.

Raw food, especially poultry and seafood, usually contains germs. Cooked food can collect germs if it touches raw food. So raw and cooked foods should always be kept away from each other. Knives, chopping boards and surfaces where food is prepared should always be cleaned after preparing raw food.

- Breastmilk is the safest milk for infants and young children. Animal milk that is freshly boiled or pasteurized is safer than unboiled milk.
- Expressed breastmilk can be stored at room temperature for up to eight hours in a clean, covered container.
- Special care should be taken with preparing food for infants and small children. Their food should be freshly made and not left standing, if possible.
- Fruit and vegetables should be peeled or washed thoroughly with clean water, especially if they are to be given raw to babies or small children. Chemicals such as pesticides and herbicides cannot be seen on fruit and vegetables but nonetheless can be dangerous.

6. Food, utensils and food preparation surfaces should be kept clean. Food should be stored in covered containers.

Germs on food can be swallowed and cause illness. To protect food from germs:

- food preparation surfaces should be kept clean
- knives, cooking utensils, pots and plates should be kept clean and covered
- cloths for cleaning dishes or pans should be washed thoroughly every day and dried in the sun. Plates,



utensils and pans should be washed immediately after eating and put on a rack to dry

- food should be kept in covered containers to protect it from insects and animals
- feeding bottles or teats should not be used because they can contain germs that cause diarrhoea unless they are cleaned each time with boiling water. Children should be breastfed or fed from a clean, open cup.

7. Safe disposal of all household refuse helps prevent illness.

Germs can be spread by flies, cockroaches, rats and mice, which thrive in refuse such as food scraps and peelings from fruit and vegetables.

If there is no community-wide collection of garbage, each family needs a garbage pit where household refuse is buried or burned every day.

Keeping the household and nearby areas clean and free of faeces, refuse and waste water can help prevent disease. Household waste water can be disposed of safely by making a soak pit or a channel to the kitchen garden or to the field.

Chemicals such as pesticides and herbicides can be very dangerous if even small quantities get into the water supply or onto food, hands or feet. Clothes and containers used when handling chemicals should not be washed near a household water source.

Pesticides and other chemicals should not be used around the household or near a water source. Chemicals should not be stored in or near drinking water containers or near food. Never store food or water in pesticide or fertilizer containers.