

# Global Handwashing Day

## Fact Sheet

### About Global Handwashing Day



Global Handwashing Day (GHD) is a global advocacy day dedicated to increasing awareness about the importance of hand hygiene and triggering lasting change from the policy-level to community-driven action. Founded by the [Global Handwashing Partnership](#), the day serves as an opportunity to design, test, and replicate creative ways to encourage people to wash their hands at critical times.

### Why are clean hands still important?

This year's Global Handwashing Day theme reflects an important question, "Why are clean hands still important?" While significant progress in hand hygiene awareness has been made, maintaining and improving hand hygiene behaviors remains crucial beyond the public health emergencies including COVID-19 pandemic. Clean hands remain a fundamental defense against the spread of infections, illnesses, and harmful germs. Whether in hospitals, schools, or in everyday interactions, practicing handwashing with soap contributes to better health outcomes and a safer world for everyone. As the world looks toward key milestones in hand hygiene progress, we urge you to reflect on your own response to this question, "Why are clean hands still important to **you**?" For us, the answer lies in our collective responsibility to safeguard public health, prevent infections, enhance dignity and promote wellbeing.

### The benefits of clean hands

Hand hygiene, whether through handwashing with soap or alcohol-based handrub, can help reduce the transmission of a range of diseases:

- Handwashing with soap can reduce diarrheal diseases by [30%](#).
- Handwashing with soap can reduce acute respiratory infections by up to [20%](#).
- Handwashing with soap plays an important role in reducing the transmission of outbreak-related pathogens such as [cholera](#), [Ebola](#), [shigellosis](#), [SARS](#), [hepatitis E](#), [COVID-19](#), and [monkeypox](#).
- Hand hygiene is protective against [healthcare-associated infections](#) and contributes to reducing the spread of [antimicrobial resistance](#).
- Hand hygiene may contribute to the reduction of [Neglected Tropical Diseases](#).

Proper hand hygiene has also been linked to benefits beyond disease reduction, such as reduced rates of [school absenteeism](#) and improvements in wellbeing, dignity, and productivity.

## Why are clean hands still important for governments?

Clean hands are crucial for public health and global health security. For governments, prioritizing hand hygiene is not just about preventing the spread of everyday illnesses; it is a strategic move to fortify a nation against disease outbreaks and rising global threats, such as [antimicrobial resistance](#) (AMR). Hand hygiene behavior change provides a cost-effective solution - adequate programming would only cost [4.7%](#) of the median health expenditure in the least developed countries and only [1%](#) of their annual aid receipts. Including hand hygiene in government plans and funding not only improves health but also boosts the economy by reducing the burden on health services and promoting high standards of care. Investing in hand hygiene ensures safe and effective healthcare, enhancing the quality of care and patient safety, and promotes wellbeing and resilience among communities.

Hand hygiene is incorporated in current Sustainable Development Goals. Many governments are committed to driving progress toward the sustainable development agenda. Addressing factors to attain high levels of hand hygiene practice can contribute to attaining [multiple sustainable development targets](#), including targets around water and sanitation, nutrition, education, health, and economic growth. Integrating hand hygiene into health, education, and [nutrition and child health programs](#) is necessary not only to achieve these targets but to prevent infections and improve health and development outcomes overall.

Some governments are already making hand hygiene progress with tools like the [Hand Hygiene Acceleration Framework Tool](#), which helps integrate hand hygiene into the national joint review process. This framework provides guidance and resources to incorporate sustainable hand hygiene practices at all levels, enhancing public health preparedness and integrating hygiene into broader agendas like health, education, and economic policies. The [Hand Hygiene Costing Tool](#) estimates the cost of improving hand hygiene in communities, aiding in budgeting and planning. These tools can support government leadership in developing costed hand hygiene roadmaps to implement and fulfill their hand hygiene commitments.

By prioritizing and budgeting for hand hygiene, governments can significantly enhance public health and economic stability. This commitment improves community well-being and strengthens long-term resilience and development. Such efforts demonstrate a government's proactive approach to safeguarding its citizens' health and future prosperity.

## Why are clean hands still important for donors?

Access to handwashing facilities and handwashing behavior change programs are vital for healthier, more resilient communities. Funding hand hygiene initiatives can significantly reduce infectious diseases, leading to better community health and productivity. Supporting hand hygiene also aligns with broader development goals, including sustainable development and

economic stability. Investments in infrastructure like handwashing facilities, soap, and water along with robust behavior change programs encourage good practices, prevent spread of the diseases, foster healthier workforces and lower healthcare costs. This creates a ripple effect, enhancing economic resilience and empowering communities to thrive. Thus, clean hands represent a commitment to both health and the economic and social well-being of societies worldwide.

In schools and workplaces, clean hands prevent illness, ensuring consistent attendance and productivity. This is crucial in the world's 46 least developed countries, where universal access to handwashing facilities could be achieved with an investment of [less than \\$1](#) per person per year. Such an investment could enable 100% of households to access these essential facilities by 2030. Cost-benefit analyses show substantial returns on investment in hand hygiene, with every dollar spent potentially yielding [35 to 92 times](#) the benefits through reduced healthcare costs and increased economic productivity. For donors, supporting these programs is a strategic decision that enhances public health and promotes economic growth and stability.

Achieving universal access and practice of hand hygiene requires significant financial commitments. According to a recent [World Bank report](#), developing countries need to increase their spending in the water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) sector by approximately \$131.4 to \$140.8 billion annually, nearly tripling current expenditure levels. This substantial increase is necessary to bridge the existing financing gaps to meet the Sustainable Development Goals for WASH by 2030. Targeted investments are essential to minimize disparities in access, emphasizing the need to direct investments to poorer and more rural communities to ensure equitable access to hand hygiene facilities. In addition, the report highlights inefficiencies in current spending, with an annual budget execution gap of 72%. Improving the efficiency of spending and enhancing the sector's absorbent capacity are critical steps toward achieving current targets.

These latest data not only highlight ways to promote social equity but also enhance the overall effectiveness of spending for the sector. Therefore, by investing in hand hygiene, donors can contribute to a healthier, more equitable world, ensuring sustainable development and long-term resilience. Addressing current financial gaps for hand hygiene signifies a commitment to health, economic growth, educational upliftment, and the social wellbeing of societies worldwide.

## Why are clean hands still important for businesses?

Promoting hand hygiene is crucial for both businesses and suppliers. For businesses, effective hand hygiene practices can significantly reduce the spread of infectious diseases, leading to fewer employee sick days and increased productivity. Research indicates that proper hand hygiene can lower the incidence of hygiene-preventable health care claims by over [20%](#). Additionally, businesses that prioritize employee health and safety through robust hand hygiene practices can enhance their reputation and employee satisfaction, which not only improves

workplace morale but can also reduce employee healthcare costs associated with treating preventable illnesses.

For suppliers, ensuring a consistent supply of hand hygiene products is vital for public health. Ensuring available and affordable hygiene products is a pre-condition to practice good hand hygiene. During health crises, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, [disruptions in supply chains](#) for hand hygiene products can lead to increased infection and mortality rates. By collaborating with governments, NGOs, and other health system actors, suppliers can help create [resilient supply chains](#) that withstand disruptions and meet the demand for essential products. Sustainable supply chains ensure that hand hygiene products are accessible and affordable to underserved communities, reducing health disparities and promoting overall public health. A reliable supply chain also supports the implementation of hand hygiene programs and interventions, essential for preventing the spread of infectious diseases.

To effectively implement hand hygiene practices, businesses should install and maintain handwashing stations in key areas – near toilets, in the kitchen, and in other shared office spaces – educate and motivate employees on [proper handwashing techniques](#), and ensure a steady supply of hygiene products. Integrating hand hygiene into workplace safety and health policies helps institutionalize these practices. Regular policy reviews ensure they remain aligned with best practices and current public health guidelines. Implementing a system to monitor hand hygiene compliance allows for ongoing assessment and improvement of hand hygiene practices.

By adopting these hand hygiene-focused strategies, businesses can protect employee and customer health, enhance their reputation, and support broader public health efforts, while suppliers can build sustainable supply chains for hand hygiene products. This unified approach enhances workplace well-being, supports public health, and strengthens overall resilience against disruptions.

## Why are clean hands still important for institutional actors in the community?

Hand hygiene is a critical aspect of public health that institutional actors in the community must prioritize, including NGOs, community-based organizations, healthcare facilities, and educational facilities. Effective hand hygiene practices can significantly reduce the transmission of infectious diseases, which is particularly important in community settings where people frequently interact. By focusing on hand hygiene, stakeholders can help prevent outbreaks of illnesses such as diarrhea, respiratory infections, and other communicable diseases. This not only improves overall community health but also reduces the burden on healthcare systems, allowing [resources](#) to be allocated more efficiently.

Investing in hand hygiene infrastructure and programs is essential for creating sustainable health improvements. Institutional actors in the community should allocate resources to install handwashing stations in key locations such as schools, healthcare facilities, and [public spaces](#). These investments should be guided by [evidence-based interventions](#) to ensure they are

effective and culturally appropriate. For example, research suggests that providing soap and clean water, along with implementing various hand hygiene behavior change activities can lead to [long-term behavioral changes](#). [Monitoring and evaluation](#) of these programs can also help identify areas for improvement and ensure that the interventions are achieving their desired outcomes.

Furthermore, institutional actors must consider inclusivity and sustainability as part of their hand hygiene efforts. It is important to ensure that [all community members](#), including marginalized and vulnerable groups, have access to hand hygiene facilities and education. This can be achieved by including community leaders and members in the planning and implementation of programs, ensuring that their needs and preferences are considered. By fostering a sense of community ownership and participation, institutional actors can enhance the [effectiveness and sustainability](#) of hand hygiene initiatives. Integrating hand hygiene into broader health and development agendas can amplify its impact, making hand hygiene a cornerstone of community health efforts. By prioritizing hand hygiene, community institutional actors can create healthier, more resilient communities.

## Why are clean hands still important for academics?

Academics have a unique opportunity to address hand hygiene gaps through their research by focusing on evidence-based strategies and translating findings into practical applications. The [2022 Hand Hygiene Research Summary](#) emphasizes the need for behavior change beyond awareness, suggesting that academics can contribute by exploring the determinants of hand hygiene behavior, such as social norms, enabling technologies, and emotional motivators. By conducting interdisciplinary research that spans public health, psychology, and technology, academics can develop comprehensive programs that not only educate but also facilitate long-term hand hygiene behavior change.

Furthermore, academics can play a crucial role in bridging the gap between research and practice. [Studies have shown](#) that access to handwashing facilities and supplies is a critical determinant for maintaining good hand hygiene. Additionally, by engaging in [participatory research](#), academics can work directly with communities to co-create solutions that are culturally appropriate and sustainable. This approach not only addresses the immediate gaps in hand hygiene but also fosters a culture of health and safety that can have a lasting impact on public health outcomes.

Academics should address evidence gaps in hand hygiene and translate their research into practical resources for intervention and program development. This approach ensures that hand hygiene practices are informed by the latest findings and effectively implemented to enhance public health outcomes. For more insight on the current state of the field, check out the 2023 Hand Hygiene Research Summary [here](#).

# What can you do?

Understanding the importance of clean hands is only the first step. To maintain this crucial practice, all stakeholders must collaborate effectively. Every individual and organization has a role to play in promoting hand hygiene. To ensure that the importance of clean hands is recognized and upheld:

- **Governments** should prioritize integrating and budgeting for hand hygiene in national response and resilience plans, as well as long-term development strategies.
- **Donors** should invest in programs that prioritize hand hygiene, promote access to hand hygiene facilities, and contribute to both public health and economic resilience.
- **Suppliers** should collaborate with governments, health systems, and NGOs to ensure sustainable supply chains for hand hygiene products.
- **Businesses** should prioritize hand hygiene for employee health and safety.
- **Institutional actors** should implement a multi-faceted approach to scale up hand hygiene in communities, including promotion, accessible facilities, regular monitoring, and behavior reinforcement.
- **Academics** should fill hand hygiene evidence gaps and translate research into practical resources for hand hygiene intervention and program development.

To learn more about our collective efforts to achieve clean hands for all, visit the Global Handwashing Partnership website [here](#).