



IMPACT 10/15/2015 05:04 pm ET | Updated Oct 16, 2015

Here's How Many People Actually Wash Their Hands After Using The Bathroom

And other facts about hand washing and disease prevention at home and in developing countries.



By Eleanor Goldberg

Thursday marks [Global Handwashing Day](#), an awareness event that stresses the simple practice of using soap and water to ward off life-threatening diseases, and the fact that so many low-income people lack access to these basic hygiene tools.

More than 200 million people are expected to come together to learn about the benefits of handwashing, the scarcity of the practice and encourage supporters to provide this cost-efficient protection to keep families safe and healthy.

1. One in Five Newborn Deaths In Developing World Occur Because Of Unhygienic Conditions



SIMON RAWLES VIA GETTY IMAGES

In the developing world, one in five newborn deaths occur because the babies aren't handled with clean hands or instruments, a recent WaterAid study concluded.

In sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia, about 20 percent of neo-natal deaths occur as a result of sepsis, a condition caused by bacteria, according to WaterAid. For example, when the umbilical cord is cut with a dirty blade, the baby is at a higher risk for contracting the infection. But when a mother bathes before giving birth, a baby is four times less likely to develop a cord infection.

2. 35% of Health Facilities in Developing Countries Don't Have Soap



BUKET BARISKAN VIA GETTY IMAGES

Thirty-five percent of hospitals in 54 developing countries don't have soap for handwashing, a WHO survey found. That means that up to one in two patients in these regions leave the hospital with infections they didn't have upon arriving.

The other issue, WHO found, is that even when soap is available, health workers often don't take advantage of it. In one African teaching hospital, for example, handwashing was only attempted 12 percent of the time.

3. Diarrhea Kills Nearly 800,000 Kids Every Year



PAULA BRONSTEIN VIA GETTY IMAGES

Annually, diarrheal diseases take the lives of about 760,000 children under 5, according to WHO. That's more than AIDS, malaria and measles combined, according to the CDC.

Such infections are typically contracted from contaminated water or food sources or poor hygiene, and frequent handwashing has been proven to help prevent getting these diseases.

4. Students Need Soap to Fight Ebola



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As the world inches closer to finding an [Ebola vaccine](#), health advocates remain committed to honing in on basic hygiene practices in order to prevent another outbreak.



Most cases of Ebola, which claimed [more than 10,000 lives](#) in the recent epidemic in West Africa, are caused by human-to-human transmission, but can be prevented just by making sure to wash frequently, according to WHO.

Now that schools have resumed, nonprofits are working to bring soap and water to students and to educate them, and administrators, about the proper way to wash their hands.

5. Only 66% of Americans Wash Their Hands



CHRISTOPHER FURLONG VIA GETTY IMAGES

While 92 percent of Americans say they believe it's important to wash their hands after using the restroom, [only 66 percent actually do](#), according to a survey conducted by the Bradley Corporation.

As for washing with soap? Almost 70 percent admitted to skipping that step of the hygienic process.

Who's helping:

- WHO provides delivery kits that foster a hygienic environment to facilities in need and, when used, newborns are more than 13 times less likely to develop a cord infection. [Think Humanity](#) has also collected more than [5,000 such kits for women](#) in Uganda. The kits, which are valued at about \$3, are equipped with a plastic sheet, soap, gloves, a sterile scalpel blade, cords and gauze squares.
- Last month, the U.N. adopted its new Sustainable Development Goals and committed to bringing [equitable sanitation and hygiene](#) to all by 2030.
- Some organizations, like [Clean the World](#), are already working to make that happen. That group collects used soap from hotels and recycles it so that it can be donated to areas without access. The nonprofit recently partnered with Global Soap to increase its production and as of April had delivered about [25 million bars to 99 countries](#), which includes homeless shelters in the U.S., according to the Associated Press.
- Cartoonist Craig Yoe, the former creative director of "The Muppets" and other childhood classics, recently partnered with Unilever to develop a comic book that teaches kids about critical washing practices. [School of Five's characters](#) urge kids to wash five times throughout the day — before meals, after using the bathroom and while bathing.
- Nonprofit [WaterSHED](#) is also appealing to kids' creative senses by bringing colorful, portable and inexpensive sinks to Cambodia where [more than 1,000 children die](#) every year due to diarrheal diseases. The green [LaBobo sinks conserve water](#), have a dedicated spot for soap and cost about \$15.
- Together with its partners, UNICEF has installed [handwashing stations at schools](#) in Liberia, Guinea and Sierra Leone, distributed chlorine and millions of bars of soap. The group has already trained tens of thousands of teachers and administrators.