

Soap and Water Save Lives!



Most of us don't give a second thought to hand washing. We usually wash after using the bathroom and before eating, but not as often as we should. One observational study shows that only 85% of people wash their hands after using a public restroom. We take soap and water for granted because both are easily obtainable. However, suppose you lived in a country where soap was a luxury item? Or suppose you didn't know that hand washing with soap and water can save children's lives?

Scary Statistics

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) estimates that 2.2 million children under age five die each year from respiratory diseases, like pneumonia and influenza, and from diarrheal diseases like cholera and typhoid. Adults die too, but children are especially vulnerable because their immune systems aren't strong enough to battle these diseases. Experts agree that regular hand washing with soap and water could significantly reduce this rate of sickness and death.

A Simple Solution?

The statistic above is shocking and heartbreaking. After all, washing your hands is such a simple thing, right? Yes and no. People around the world use water to rinse their hands, but very few use soap. One reason is the cost. In South Sudan, soap can cost more than a day's wages! If you had to choose between buying soap and buying food, which would you pick?

Also, people in developing countries often don't receive as much education about hygiene and how diseases are transmitted. Actually, many Americans don't realize that feces is the main source of food poisoning and many other deadly infections. Three common ways feces gets on people's hands is after they change diapers, use the toilet, or take care of animals. People may rinse their hands if they have access to water, but a person needs to scrub with soap to remove all the germs and fecal material.

You Can Help!

How can you help promote hand washing throughout the world? Get your friends, your class, or your school involved in Global Handwashing Day, celebrated every October 15. Each year, over 200 million people are involved in celebrations in over 100 countries around the world. Sponsors of the event call hand washing a "do-it-yourself vaccine" against deadly infections.

Hand washing alone won't eradicate disease in developing countries. Other measures, like water purification and fly control, are also needed. But proper hand washing with soap and water remains the easiest, cheapest, and most effective way to save the lives of millions of children.

Write the answers.

1. According to the CDC, how many children under age five die from respiratory diseases and diarrhea every year?

2. Why do more children die of these diseases than adults? _____

3. What is the main source of food poisoning and other deadly infections? _____

4. Give two reasons people around the world may not use soap when washing their hands. _____

5. What is the purpose of Global Handwashing Day? _____

“SOAP AND WATER SAVE LIVES!”

(RI.9–10.1, RI.11–12.1)

ANSWER KEY

1. 2.2 million
2. Children’s immune systems aren’t strong enough to battle these diseases.
3. feces
4. Possible answers include that soap can be expensive and people may be less knowledgeable about hygiene and how diseases are transmitted.
5. to promote proper hand washing throughout the world