

Pack 116

Type: Backgrounder

2021

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**Backgrounder: Good hygiene for good health**

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**Why worry about hygiene?**

Humans live in an environment that is not naturally favourable to them.

* Their health can be regularly affected or altered by natural (climatic, microbial), social or professional factors (promiscuity, pollution, nuisances, and urbanization).
* Hygiene and sanitation are among the most effective means of reducing the risk of transmission of diarrheal diseases, which are the leading cause of mortality among children under five.

1. **Food hygiene**

Hygiene measures concern the entire food chain, from food production, storage, transport, and distribution to preparation and consumption, as food contamination can occur at any of these stages.

It should also be remembered that water, like food, can be an important vector of infections. Most bacteria and viruses survive for a long time, especially at temperatures between 10 and 30°C. Water contamination is largely due to fecal pollution, but also to industrial pollution, in particular the discharge of wastewater directly into nearby waterways.

*How important is food hygiene?*

The consumer who has suffered from food poisoning is more than aware of the dangers of poor hygiene.

*Examples of good hygiene practices for those who prepare food***:**

* Hands should be washed regularly and effectively with clean water and soap, especially after using the toilet and after handling raw materials, waste, or chemicals.
* Sneezing or coughing into the hands or touching the hair, nose, or mouth while handling food should be avoided. If these actions cannot be avoided, hand washing is essential.
* Avoid unhealthy habits such as eating, drinking, chewing, and smoking while working with food.
* Personnel working in food handling areas should wear appropriate and clean clothing and if necessary protective clothing, e.g., hair hats, gloves, apron, etc.
* Protect food and drinking water from flies by covering.

1. **Latrine hygiene**

Latrines can increase the transmission of diseases. In view of the risk of faeces transmitting disease, the recommendation is to use toilets and latrines rather than eliminate waste in the open air, and to ensure that toilets and latrines are cleaned regularly.

Therefore, we need to:

* Cleanly evacuate all faeces, including those of babies and young children.
* Clean toilets and latrines regularly.
* Teach children the importance of relieving themselves in a latrine.

1. **Menstrual hygiene**

It is natural for women and girls to have regular bleeding. This bleeding typically lasts from 2-7 days. The occurrence of bleeding every 21 to 35 days is called the menstrual cycle or period.

It is very important that young girls know how to manage their menstrual cycle from the beginning, and this requires a lot of information and care.

Unfortunately, there is lack of good information about menstrual hygiene due to social constraints that make discussion difficult. (1)

This shame and embarrassment leads to poor hygiene during menstruation, which can be a source of illness. (2)

*Some facts to remember*

* The first cycles are often irregular. A girl may have her first period and then not have any for a few months. This irregularity is not a sign of a health problem and can last for the first two years. However, 80% of these irregular cycles are "ovulatory," i.e., the girl is fertile.
* Some girls have their first period as early as nine years old.
* Some women have a 28-day cycle while others have a longer (36 day) or shorter (21 day) cycle.

*What menstruation is not*

* A disease, an illness, a pathology, or an infection.
* Dangerous, unhealthy, dirty, shameful, impure, or other "negative" perceptions.

*Menstrual hygiene is important because it:*

* Prevents infections.
* Prevents body odour.
* Allows women to stay healthy.
* Allows women to feel comfortable, confident, and fresh throughout the day.
* Helps avoid stress in the workplace and at school.

*The following symptoms may be signs of abnormal discharge and indicate a health problem:*

* Discharge with itching, redness, or pain.
* Persistent, heavier-than-usual discharge.
* White, lumpy discharge (like curdled milk).
* Grey-white or yellow-green bad-smelling discharge.

*Intimate hygiene: What to avoid?*

It is important to know that there are healthy bacteria and pathogenic \* bacteria in the vagina. We need to avoid certain types of intimate cleansing care (for example, vaginal douches, regularly wearing panty liners, internal deodorants, and regular use of lemon) that create an imbalance in this environment. For this reason:

* It’s not necessary to completely avoid sexual intercourse during your period, but because this time is more conducive to introducing bacteria, it’s important to wear a condom.
* Avoid wearing wet underwear for too long, as this encourages the growth of pathogens.
* Avoid wearing clothes that are too tight. Lack of ventilation encourages the development of bacteria and friction causes irritation.
* Avoid deodorants and perfumed soaps for your intimate hygiene. These can cause itching irritation and can enable the development of mycosis \* in the vulva-vaginal area. (3)
* Soap and water is the best method for ensuring that the vagina remains clean and hygienic. It’s only necessary to wash the external genitals.

*Safe menstrual hygiene practices*

* Change sanitary protection at least three times a day, or when sanitary material is soaked.
* Change underwear (panties) daily.
* Wash hands before and after changing sanitary protection.
* Wash cloth pads with hot water and salt and dry them in the sun. These are personal materials and should not be shared.
* Use only clean cotton or cloth sanitary pads or liners and use them exclusively for menstrual hygiene.

*How to minimize poor menstrual hygiene practices*

* Teach and promote hygiene to women and girls.
* Educate young girls from primary school onwards.
* Teach young girls to wash their vulvas and hands properly with soap and water.
* Sensitize parents and teachers on their role in managing menstrual hygiene. (4)

1. **Water hygiene**

Water contamination can have various causes: chemical contamination (by arsenic and fluoride, for example) is frequently of natural origin, while microbial contamination (bacteria, viruses, amoebas, etc.) is most often the result of human activity or the presence of animals near water points. Studies have shown that there is often a significant deterioration in the quality of water between the time it is collected at the source and the time it is drunk. Hence the need for treatment and safe storage at home. (5)

The best way to obtain clean drinking water is from an underground source (protected well or borehole). In the absence of a safe water source, there are several ways to purify water:

* Boil it (for at least five minutes).
* Add chlorine (only under the supervision of a specialist or after training).
* Add water purification tablets according to the instructions for use.
* Filter it with cloth, candles, two large clay pots filled with sand and gravel or charcoal; other filters are available on the market.
* Expose it to sunlight: disinfection of water by solar radiation (ultraviolet rays kill microbes).
* Clarify it with moringa powder (*Moringa olifera*). Add moringa powder to a bucket of water and wait for the dirt to be captured. The water becomes clear but is not 100% drinkable. It is necessary to further purify it with other means. (6)

*Water transport and conservation (7)*

All water containers should be cleaned regularly with soap and water. To keep the water supply at home clean, families can:

* Store drinking water in a clean container with a lid.
* Use a clean ladle or cup to draw water from the container.
* If possible, put a tap on the water container.
* Do not allow anyone to put their hand in the water or drink directly from the container.
* Ensure that animals do not approach the water supply.
* If you are unsure of the quality of your drinking water, consult the authorities.

If a family has enough safe water and knows how to protect it from germs, they will get sick less often.

1. **General house/premises hygiene**

Household hygiene is a major element in the chain of transmitting infections. It is simply the elimination of germs by using effective cleaning techniques and products. The most basic message that everyone knows is regular handwashing. This is linked to all types of hygiene. Indeed, personal and food hygiene are steps towards keeping a clean house.

*Simple actions to maintain a healthy living environment:*

* Washing your hands should be a habit (before lunch, after going to the bathroom, etc.)
* Air the house daily (at least 10 minutes) to maintain a healthy atmosphere (air renewal + reduction of the concentration of pollutants).
* Clean the house at least once a week.
* Wash your clothes (and sheets, towels, carpets ...) regularly.
* Remove your shoes before entering a bathroom or a bedroom.
* Put away your belongings after use - saving time and avoiding falls.
* Each family should have a garbage can to collect their household waste. (8)

1. **Handwashing**

Hand hygiene consists in respecting simple actions intended to ensure the cleanliness of our hands in order to protect ourselves from infections and to preserve our lives. The UN decided in 2008 to dedicate October 15 as Global Handwashing Day, a day dedicated to raising awareness of handwashing with soap as a key factor in disease prevention.

Hands are the main carriers of pathogenic germs. It is estimated that if hand washing with soap were widely practiced, approximately 230,000 deaths could be prevented annually. (9)

*The five critical handwashing moments*

* Before eating
* Before preparing food
* Before feeding or breastfeeding children
* After using a latrine or defecating
* After changing your child's diaper or washing your child

*Water alone is not enough*

Handwashing with water alone, a common practice around the world, is far less effective than handwashing with soap. Good handwashing requires soap and only a small amount of water.

Washing your hands in water will not always remove grease and dirt, and when grease and dirt remain on your hands, so do germs. Soap breaks down the germ-carrying dirt and grease and facilitates rubbing and friction.

*What is effective hand washing? (10)*

For handwashing to be effective, it must be done regularly and without skipping steps. For proper handwashing, follow these steps:

1. Wet your hands with water.
2. Lather up with soap and don't forget the back of your hands, under your fingernails, and between your fingers.
3. Rub your hands together for at least 20 seconds.
4. Rinse with water.
5. Air dry or dry your hands with a clean cloth.
6. **COVID-19 and hygiene**

The coronavirus (COVID-19) disease is spread when mucus or droplets containing the virus enter the body through the eyes, nose, or throat. During a pandemic, frequent handwashing with soap and water is one of the most cost-effective, easy, and important measures to prevent the spread of the virus.

To prevent the spread of COVID-19, wash your hands at the following times:

* After blowing your nose, coughing, or sneezing.
* After going to a public place, including public transportation, markets, and places of worship.
* After touching surfaces outside your home, including money.
* Before, during, and after care if you are caring for someone who is ill.
* Before and after eating.

In general, you should always wash your hands at the following times: 

* After using the bathroom.
* Before and after eating.
* After handling garbage.
* After touching animals, including pets.
* After changing your baby's diaper or helping your child use the bathroom.
* When your hands are visibly dirty.

*How can I help my child wash his or her hands?*

You can help your child wash his or her hands by making it easier for them to do so, for example, by setting up a step so they can reach the soap and water on their own. You can also make it fun by singing a favourite song while you help your child scrub.

*What if I don't have soap?*

If you don't have soap and running water, using a hydro-alcoholic solution containing at least 60% alcohol is the next best thing. Using ashes may help kill bacteria, but not as effectively.

*What other steps can I take to stop the spread of the coronavirus?*

Practice physical distancing: stay at least three feet away from others, ventilate rooms frequently or leave windows open, avoid shaking hands, hugging, and kissing, sharing cutlery, glasses, and napkins.

Wear a mask when you are unable to maintain physical distancing, especially in enclosed indoor spaces.

Stay home if you feel unwell and avoid close contact with people with cold or flu-like symptoms.

Seek prompt medical attention if you have a cough, fever, or difficulty breathing, or if you notice the same symptoms in your child.

**Definitions**

*Mycosis: A* disease caused by infection with a fungus, such as ringworm or thrush.

*Pathogen*: A bacterium, virus, or other microorganism that can cause disease.

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**Acknowledgements**

Contributed by : Ouabouè Bakouan, Rédacteur en Chef de Radio Manivelle-Dano

Reviewed by: Sibri Joseph Congo | Save the Children | Coordinator WASH – ViMPlus, Burkina Faso.

*This resource was produced for the VIMPlus project. ViMPlus is part of USAID’s Resilience in the Sahel Enhanced (RISE) program, which supports vulnerable communities in Burkina Faso and Niger to effectively prepare for and manage recurrent crises and pursue sustainable pathways out of poverty.*