



Fast Facts

Global Handwashing Day 2008

- More than 5,000 children every day or 1.7 million children every year die from diarrheal diseases before the age of five. Diarrhea is the second most common cause of death in children accounting for 18 per cent of all under-five deaths¹.
- Handwashing at critical times - including before eating or preparing food and after using the toilet - can reduce diarrhea rates among children under 5 by almost 50 per cent².
- Handwashing with soap can reduce the incidence of acute respiratory infections (ARI's) by around 23 per cent.³ Pneumonia, a major ARI, is the number one cause of mortality among children under five years old, taking the life of an estimated 1.8 million children per year⁴.
- Diarrhea and pneumonia, together account for almost 3.5 million child deaths annually⁵.
- Rates of handwashing around the world are low. Observed rates of handwashing with soap at critical moments – i.e, before handling food and after using the toilet - range from zero per cent to 34 per cent⁶.
- A recent study shows that handwashing with soap by birth attendants and mothers significantly increased newborn survival rates by up to 44 per cent⁷.
- Handwashing with soap is the single most cost-effective intervention to prevent diarrheal related deaths and disease⁸.

¹ The State of the World's Children 2008. *Child Survival*. UNICEF

² Curtis, V., and S. Cairncross. 2003. "Effect of Washing Hands with Soap on Diarrhea Risk in the Community: A Systematic Review." *Lancet Infectious Diseases* 3: 275–81.

³ Rabie, T and Curtis, V. (2006): Handwashing and risk of respiratory infections: a quantitative systematic review. *Tropical Medicine and International Health*, 11(3), 258-267.

⁴ The State of the World's Children 2008. *Child Survival*. UNICEF

⁵ The State of the World's Children 2008. *Child Survival*. UNICEF

⁶ Scott B, Curtis V & Rabie, T. 2003. Protecting children from diarrhoea and acute respiratory infections: the role of handwashing promotion in water and sanitation programmes. WHO Regional Health Forum 7, 42–47

⁷ Victor Rhee; Luke C. Mullany; Subarna K. Khatri; Joanne Katz; Steven C. LeClerq; Gary L. Darmstadt; James M. Tielsch. Maternal and Birth Attendant Hand Washing and Neonatal Mortality in Southern Nepal Arch Pediatr Adolesc Med. 2008; 162(7):603-608.

⁸ Cairncross, S. Valdmanis V. 2006. *Water supply, sanitation and hygiene promotion. Chapter 41*. In. *Disease Control Priorities in Developing Countries. Second Edition*. Edt. Jameson et al 2006. The World Bank. Washington DC: National Institutes of Health.