STRENGTHENING HYGIENE PROMOTION AND HANDWASHING WITH SOAP DURING EPIDEMICS AND BEYOND

**Why the Note:** This note provides a few tips for WASH practitioners in addressing hygiene promotion during epidemics and sustaining this habit after any disease outbreaks.

**Building on hygiene promotion to improve handwashing with soap**

In recent decades, a number of factors have led to a rise in the rate of emerging infections with the potential to cause internationally significant epidemics. The spread of COVID-19 is perhaps the global pandemic that has had unprecedented socio-economic impact globally.

Hygiene promotion and particularly, handwashing with soap to prevent or mitigate water, sanitation, and hygiene-related diseases, is a cornerstone of humanitarian response during infectious disease outbreaks.

Despite this, we know little about how humanitarian organizations design, deliver or monitor hygiene programmes, or about what works to change hygiene behaviors in outbreak settings. Epidemics usually create fear that can quickly change existing norms, but those changing norms are not necessarily...
sustainable over years. Here are a few tips suggested to sustain hygiene behavior during and after outbreaks using the epidemic situation.

For COVID-19 prevention, handwashing with soap is considered to be the most effective barrier. This is graphically represented blow. As such, UNICEF aims to promote a nationwide handwashing campaign to reduce the transmission of this disease in a phased manner as described in Figure 1.

**Vision:** All children and families are healthy in any epidemic situation.

**Outcome:** All children and families effectively practice handwashing with soap and reduce the risk of COVID-19 transmission epidemics.

**Approach:** A three-phased approach for a hygiene promotion and handwashing programme is recommended for WASH practitioners as illustrated in Table 1.
Table 1. Three-Phased Approach for a Sustained Hygiene Promotion and Handwashing Programme

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Messaging: Hygiene messages are standardized across the country and, if possible, contextualized to different experiences within the country.</th>
<th>Phase 1: Central Message (2–3 months till zero case observed): COVID-19 kills and hand washing with soap saves lives.</th>
<th>Phase 2: Central Message (3–6 months): COVID-19 is real, handwashing with soap can prevent it.</th>
<th>Phase 3: Central Message (6 months to years and slowly changing the disease name): COVID-19 will never come back, handwashing will keep it away.</th>
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<td>✓ Map existing national channels, campaigns and promotion activities for hygiene (e.g. WASH in schools, MHM in schools, WASH in HCFs, nutrition/education promotion, etc.). Explore opportunities to mobilize social media influencers and platforms to disseminate key hygiene messages.</td>
<td>✓ Create new messages to reflect the change in dynamic (e.g. WASH in schools, MHM in schools, WASH in HCFs, nutrition/education promotion, etc.). Use the most popular channel for the promotion (Long term agreement with telecommunication and other messaging entities, radio and television on spots using most entertaining spots – Sketch, hand washing series, etc.).</td>
<td>✓ Create new messages to reflect the change in dynamic related to the messages (e.g. WASH in schools, MHM in schools, WASH in HCFs, nutrition/education promotion, etc.). Engage different channel in the messaging diffusion. Conduct handwashing drills frequently with specific tests. Develop a plan to reach the marginalized communities.</td>
<td>✓ Identify existing government or cluster coordination mechanisms related to hygiene promotion in public health emergencies and potential gaps, both at national, sub-national, regional and local levels.</td>
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<td>✓ Education</td>
<td>✓ Promote champions for national handwashing campaign (head state, influencers demonstration how the battle was won) and acknowledge publication those champions for the cause.</td>
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**C4D and PME**

- ✓ Review internal C4D and WASH (hygiene) capacity and provide technical inputs in the planning and implementation of hygiene promotion and HWWS activities.
- ✓ Review existing country-specific data (e.g. MICS, DHS, KAP) on relevant hygiene practices and behavioural drivers of these practices.
- ✓ Collect existing hygiene promotion materials and tools tailored to specific country context (culturally appropriate, in local language, etc.) and align these materials with COVID-19 needs.
- ✓ Review the capacity of implementing partners and private sector in delivering hygiene supplies and behaviour change communication. Identify their reach and target groups and determine whether any significant gaps exist in their reach.
- ✓ Develop a business case for hygiene promotion at all levels and plan resources for them.
- ✓ Continue private sector engagement on the cause [engaging at scale] with the developed viability gap analysis for handwashing.
- ✓ Scale up implementation of hygiene promotion activities building on existing community engagement activities (e.g. hygiene, health, education, nutrition promotion) at scale.
- ✓ Scale up handwashing with soap stations in schools and public places and ensure that at those places, the WASH washing pre-requisites of water and soap are available.
- ✓ Support/strengthen hygiene promotion offices and incentivize community health works in the promotion.
- ✓ Private sector to continue promoting hand washing in their relevant sectors
- ✓ Enforcement of hand washing in schools and health care facilities and communities
- ✓ National-/district/community-level handwashing championships
- ✓ Document challenges, lessons learned and innovations for behaviour change in handwashing practices
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**Behaviour change**
- ✓ Implement hygiene promotion activities building on existing community engagement activities (e.g. hygiene, health, education, nutrition promotion) and in coordination with C4D.
- ✓ Build/update handwashing with soap stations in school and public places and ensure that at those places, the WASH washing pre-requisites of water and soap are available.

**Evaluation**
- ✓ Collect baseline information on hygiene promotion and hand washing with soap or draw data from the latest JMP reports.
- ✓ Promote social norms change around handwashing behaviour.
- ✓ Create new norms around handwashing with soap as a lifelong habit.

- ✓ Review lessons learnt from past hygiene promotion and hand washing activities including in emergency context.
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This note should be used as complement for the existing materials available (Click on each title to access the respective document).

- Joint WHO-UNICEF WASH Technical Brief
- WHO technical guidance pages on IPC
- COVID-19: UNICEF hygiene programming
- Behaviour change communication in emergencies: A toolkit
- Handwashing promotion monitoring and evaluation module (pages 81-110)
- WHO guidance on hand hygiene
- Lessons learnt from hygiene promotion activities during 2013-2014 Ebola outbreak