



Hygiene

Hygiene



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What is Hygiene?

Hygiene refers to conditions and practices that help to maintain good health and prevent the spread of diseases. Good hygiene is also often referred to as “cleanliness”. Bad hygiene practises and improper sanitation are one of the main reasons for diseases spreading in the communities. Improvements in hygiene practices, access to proper sanitation, water and washing facilities will reduce child mortality, lethal infections, illnesses and malnutrition. When people stay healthy, they can also work and go to school as well as participate in the community activities.



Figure 1. Always remember to wash your hands with soap.

Hygiene is Important in Our Everyday Life!

Taking care of personal and everyday life hygiene can significantly reduce the risk of being contaminated by potentially harmful germs.

The single most important preventive health measure one can take in an everyday life is washing hands regularly, especially after using the toilet and before coming into contact with any foods.

Many pathogens (infectious germs that can cause a disease) such as viruses, bacteria, prions, fungi, viroids or parasites can spread from the faecal material due to poor sanitation and hygiene conditions. The main spreading routes of pathogens are contaminated water, soil, food as well as insects and pests. Sick people can also be the source of pathogens. One of the main routes for disease causing pathogens to spread are the hands and contamination from hand to food.

People get sick by drinking water contaminated with animal or human faeces or by eating food with unwashed hands that have pathogens in them. This is called faecal-oral route.

Examples of some diseases that can be passed via the faecal-oral route are:

- Ascariasis and other soil transmitted helminthiasis
- Cholera
- Giardiasis (protozoa)
- Hepatitis A and E
- Hookworms
- Typhoid fever etc.



Figure 2. Faecal-oral route of spreading diseases.

Disease-causing pathogens can transmit in different ways, such as:

- Direct contact to human excreta
- Contaminated drinking water (e.g. groundwater contamination from pit latrines and using open wells, lakes and rivers as water source)
- Accidental ingestion of contaminated water e.g. during swimming
- By eating or touching food with unwashed hands that have pathogens in them
- By biting fingernails or putting dirty fingers in your mouth
- Through uncooked vegetables, shellfish or other food products exposed to contaminated water or soil / faecal matter
- Through flies and other insects (for example through flies that come into contact with faeces and later on with your food)
- Contact with animals that might carry parasites and transmittable diseases.

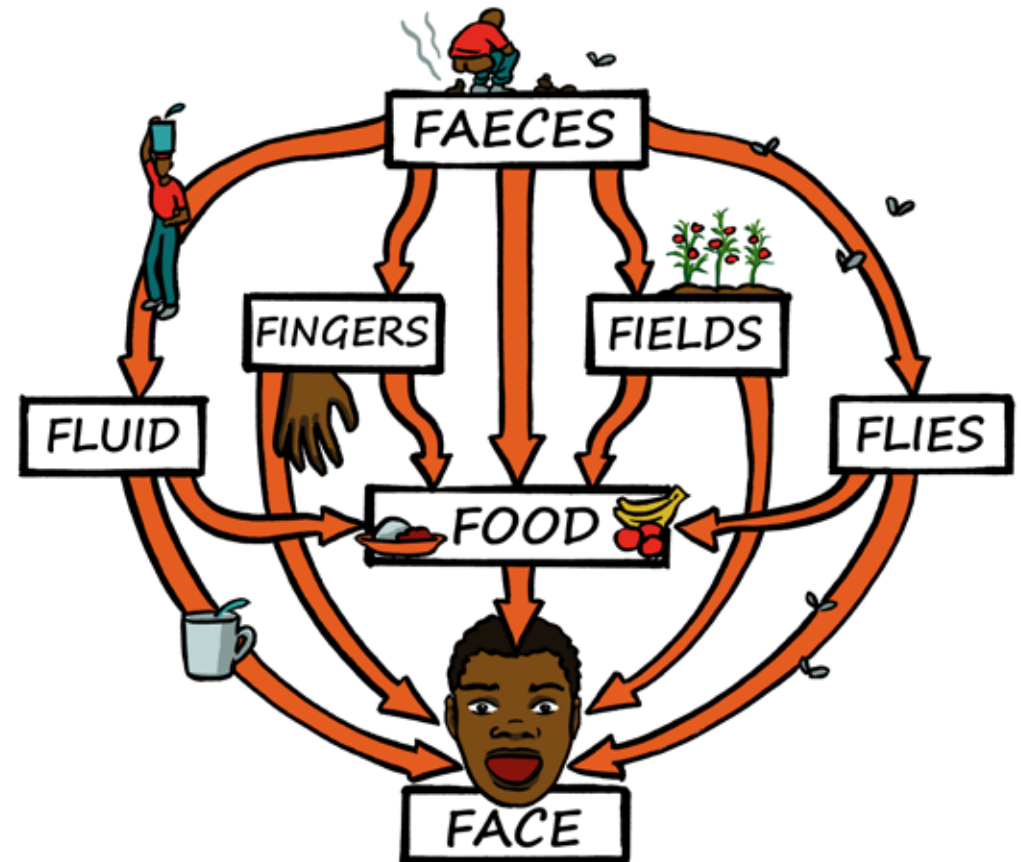


Figure 3. Spreading routes of pathogens through poor sanitation.

How to Improve Your Hygiene?

Proper hygiene can decrease the spread of diseases dramatically.

Most important means to improve hygiene are:

- washing hands after defecation (also children's hand) and before touching food and water
- adequate sanitation facilities and their proper use and maintenance
- proper handling and disposal of solid excrement and urine
- adequate storage and usage of clean water
- adequate usage and storage of food
- cleaning of the premises regularly
- safe disposal of solid waste.

Hygiene in the Households

To reduce the spread of pathogens, house and the surrounding area should be kept clean. Drinking water should be stored in closed containers and boiled or chlorinated if needed. Food should always be stored in a cool place if possible and protected from flies and other insects. Vegetables should be washed with clean water and preferably cooked for food consumption.

Routine cleaning of toilet seats, doors, handles and floor reduces the risk of pathogens. Pathogens can mostly be found in the toilet bowl but they can also be found on the seat, the floor, door handles, walls etc.

Cleaning of toilets and hand washing facilities is not only important for pathogen prevention but also to prevent odours and to make the toilet socially acceptable. Social acceptance is an important part of encouraging people to use toilets. Hand washing, wiping/cleaning properly after both urination and defecation and keeping the toilet area clean are most important for good toilet hygiene.

NB! All toilets should have a hand washing facility inside or nearby the toilet with clean water and soap available at all times.

Hand Hygiene

Hand hygiene means washing hands and nails with soap and water or using a waterless hand sanitizer. Hand washing is the basic key to prevent spread of infectious diseases. Research shows that, if widely practiced, hand washing with soap could reduce diarrhoea cases by almost 50% and respiratory infections by nearly 25%. Hand washing with soap also reduces the incidence of skin diseases, eye infections and intestinal worms.

If no soap is available, ash can be used as an alternative to soap. In public places with no wash facilities/equipment's a waterless hand sanitizer such as an alcohol hand gel can be used. However, it should be noted that hand sanitizers are not available everywhere and might also be too expensive in developing countries. In areas without water network/taps, water -conserving solutions such as tippy-taps or simple hand washing devises could be utilized. A tippy-tap is a simple hand washing device where a jug is hanged by a rope to pour a small amount of water over the hands. There can be a foot operated lever.

Build a Tippy-Tap





Figure 4.
Good personal hygiene practices can improve your self esteem.

Personal Hygiene

To keep the family healthy, personal hygiene is important for everyone, both adults and children. Advantages of good personal hygiene practices are the reduction of personal illnesses, improving the sense of confidence and self-esteem, social acceptance and prevention of spread of illness to others.

Examples of practices that are considered proper hygiene include:

- Bathing regularly
- Washing hands regularly and especially before handling food and after toilet use
- Washing hair
- Wearing underwear
- Wearing clean clothing
- Brushing one's teeth
- Cutting finger nails.

Some practices are gender-specific, such as hygiene practices of women during menstrual cycle.

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