Child Health and Quality of Life

Why is water, sanitation and hygiene so important for child health?

Why water, sanitation and hygiene?

The facts

Millennium Development Goal

The Child Health Millennium Development Goal

Key references


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Once community sewers are installed, the impact is to increase the effect of other interventions on child health, like safe water supply. There are therefore major wider benefits of installing sanitation for the wider community.

Most endemic diarrhoeal disease is not water-borne but transmitted from person to person on hands and through food due to ... with soap reduces diarrhoea by more than 40%, and cases of hospitalised diarrhoea, cholera and dysentery by more than 50%.

Kamanganjulu, one of 30 small rural settlements in Malawi developing safe water sources and upgrading sanitation facilities, ... 70% of its inhabitants had no access to safe water or sanitation and one in four babies did not reach their fifth birthday.

Several studies in the last decade have failed to find any health benefits when water quality alone is improved without hygiene education.

The impact of helminth reduction programs in schools is remarkable. A study in Jamaica found that children treated against a helminth infection perform much better in school than children who do not receive treatment.

Children living in communities without sewers and drains had three times the rate of diarrhoea than those with sanitation infrastructure.

In Madagascar, WaterAid projects have meant that diarrhoea, once the major child-killer, has now virtually disappeared. ... a more hygienic domestic environment gives mosquitoes and fleas, the carriers of malaria and plague, less chance to thrive.

School attendance, especially amongst girls, has increased, following the construction of a borehole, handpump and separate ... An Environmental Health Club has increased handwashing by 95%, with a 90% increase in bathing and brushing teeth regularly.

Within rural communities, not all households are equally served, with only 40% having reliable access in one community-managed programme.

Ease of access to water affects how much people use and its consumption drops significantly when water is carried for more than a few minutes away from a source.

Access to water affects the quantity used for domestic and drinking purposes. This is an important factor related to health.

Access to safe water and sanitation enables women to maintain more hygienic standards of home and childcare. This is due to the easy availability of water and to less time spent fetching it.

About 6 million people are blind from trachoma. Adequate water supply can reduce the infection rate by 25%.

School performance showed that children in households with no toilet, had twice the incidence of diarrhoea than those with sanitary toilets.

Unhygienic home environments can expose children to infectious diseases carried by unsafe water, inappropriate sanitation or a lack of hygiene.

Other diseases related to inadequate water and sanitation services include skin and eye infections, (trachoma, preventable blindness), (transmitted through infected water), and dengue (carried by mosquitoes in unhygienic domestic water vessels).

Worms infect more than a third of the world’s population. Worm infection (helminths) is ranked as the main cause of ... years old. These are spread through unhygienic environments (such as contaminated soil or water) and unhygienic behaviour.

The facts

- 1.7 million young children die each year from diarrhoea related to inadequate water, sanitation and hygiene.
- 2.6 million children suffer from severe acute malnutrition.
- 22% of deaths in children under-five are caused by diarrhoea.
- 75% of all deaths of children under-five are preventable, with good health services being key.
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