

Living in a Clean and Healthy World

This podcast is presented by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. CDC – safer, healthier people.

On this planet, there are over two and a half billion people living without basic sanitation; that's almost forty percent of the world's population! Basic sanitation means having access to facilities for safely disposing of human waste, as well as having the ability to maintain hygienic conditions, through services, such as garbage collection and wastewater disposal. Many developing countries can't provide adequate sanitation to their populations, which puts people at risk for diseases caused by unsafe drinking water and poor living conditions.

The United Nations General Assembly designated 2008 as the "International Year of Sanitation," and they're calling upon all nations, UN agencies, domestic and international organizations, and other stakeholders to take an active role in providing basic sanitation.

Worldwide, eighty-eight percent of all diarrheal diseases are caused by unsafe water supplies, inadequate sanitation, and poor hygiene. Every year, more than one and a half million children under 5 years of age die from diarrheal disease attributed to these factors-- that's one child dying every 20 seconds! An estimated 2 billion people are infected with intestinal worms, which are also associated with these factors. Infected children can suffer from malnutrition, growth retardation, and impairment of mental skills.

Unsafe water and poor sanitation and hygiene have social consequences as well. Disease; domestic chores, such as fetching water from a great distance; and the lack of separate school latrines for boys and girls reduce school attendance and negatively affect the education of children, which continues the cycle of poverty. Effective sanitation programs should include efforts to increase access to latrines and toilets and improve wastewater management, to promote personal hygiene and hand washing, and to improve drinking water quality. Latrines and toilets play an important role in any sanitation system. Without access to latrines and toilets, human waste is often not disposed of properly and can contaminate a community's land and water, which increases the risk of infection. By installing and maintaining latrines and toilets, the spread of many infectious diseases can be interrupted, leading to healthier communities. In addition, hand washing facilities with soap and clean water should be available at latrines and toilets, to reduce the risk of contaminated hands spreading disease.

As simple as hand washing may seem, it's one of the most important things that can be done to stay healthy. Unwashed hands can help spread bacteria, parasites, and viruses that come from human and animal feces. Everyone should wash their hands after using the bathroom, before and after preparing and eating food, and during times of illness.

To wash your hands properly:

Use lots of soap and, if available, clean running water and rub soapy hands together for at least 20 seconds. By properly washing hands more often, we can all improve sanitation and reduce the spread of disease.

When safe drinking water is not available, simple, inexpensive technologies that allow families to treat and safely store drinking water in their homes can prevent illness and save lives. More information on household water treatment is available on CDC's Safe Water Systems webpage at www.cdc.gov/safewater.

The United States' drinking water supplies are among the safest in the world, due to access to sanitation facilities, proper wastewater management systems, and effective monitoring of drinking water quality. However, even in the U.S., drinking water can become contaminated and cause health problems, such as gastrointestinal illness, reproductive problems, and neurological disorders.

To get more information about safe drinking water, visit CDC's website at www.cdc.gov and the Environmental Protection Agency's website at www.epa.gov.

For the most accurate health information, visit www.cdc.gov or call 1-800-CDC-INFO, 24/7.