Child Mortality: Diarrhoea and Pneumonia

- Diarrhoea and pneumonia are the two leading killers of children, accounting for 29% of under 5 deaths globally – claiming more than two million lives each year (estimates 2 million)
- More than 80% of these deaths occur in sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia
- Every year, 759,000 children under 5 die due to diarrhoea
- Each year, 1.242 million children under 5 die from pneumonia

The benefits of handwashing with soap – reducing disease

- Handwashing with soap at critical times – before eating or preparing food and after using the toilet – can reduce diarrhoeal risk by 45%\(^2\)
- Handwashing with soap can reduce the incidence of acute respiratory infections (ARIs), such as pneumonia, by 23 per cent\(^3\)
- Handwashing by mothers and birth attendants was associated with a 40-44% reduction in neonatal mortality in a recent study in Nepal\(^4\)
- Handwashing with soap prevents trachoma and ascaris infections\(^5\)
- Handwashing with soap is an effective control measure in pandemics such as SARS\(^6\) and Pandemic Flu\(^7\) Several studies carried out during the 2006 outbreak of severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) suggest that washing hands more than 10 times a day can cut the spread of the respiratory virus by 55%\(^8\)

Cost-effectiveness

Handwashing with soap is the single most cost-effective health intervention. A $3.35 investment in handwashing brings the same health benefits as an $11.00 investment in latrine construction, a $200.00 investment in household water supply, and an investment of thousands of dollars in immunisation.\(^9\)

The benefits of handwashing with soap and schools

New studies suggest that handwashing promotion in schools can play a role in reducing absenteeism among primary school children. In China, Colombia and Egypt primary school absenteeism due to diarrhoea or and respiratory infections dropped between 20% and 50% as a result of better handwashing practices.\(^10\)
End notes


10. Three Studies:


