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Global Handwashing Day Celebrated in Ethiopia

Have you washed? I wash my hands properly to save lives

Addis Ababa, 15 October 2020 – Today, Global Handwashing Day is celebrated in Ethiopia with the theme “*I wash my hands properly to save lives,*” which aligns with the recently launched global initiative led by WHO and UNICEF - [Hand Hygiene for All](#). The campaign calls for of the whole community to scale up hand hygiene practices through increased political leadership, a stronger enabling environment, and robust supply and demand for hand hygiene facilities and supplies.

The COVID-19 pandemic provides an important reminder that hand hygiene is a fundamental component of health and safety. To beat the virus today and ensure good health for all, this year’s Global Handwashing Day emphasizes the need to take immediate action on hand hygiene across all settings to respond to and control the pandemic. It also serves as a reminder of the need to build on the current momentum to ensure hand hygiene becomes a key pillar of public health interventions.

“Hand washing is a simple, cost effective and yet a very impactful intervention to significantly improve the health, education, social and economic status of the country. It is a very effective way to reduce communicable disease burden, under 5 mortality, health facility infection and antibiotics resistance,” says Dr Lia Tadese, Minister of Health.

Globally, basic hand hygiene is often neglected, in part due to the lack of access to handwashing facilities in key places - 40 per cent of the world’s population, or 3 billion people, do not have a handwashing facility with water and soap at home.

In Ethiopia, it is estimated that 92 per cent (about 100 million) of the population lacks access to a basic handwashing facility such as water supply and soap (UNICEF/WHO JMP, 2019). Approximately 80 per cent of those who lack access to soap and water live in rural settings and are among the most vulnerable groups, including families living in informal settlements, migrant and refugee camps, and in areas of active conflict – and more than half are children. While access to soap and water is an important first step, this must also be complemented by handwashing behavioral change, in order to ensure handwashing becomes a long-term habit and a regular practice.

“The COVID-19 pandemic will have a long-lasting impact on vulnerable families and children,” says Ms Adele Khodr, UNICEF Representative to Ethiopia. “It has not only showed us the importance of hygiene in disease prevention, but also given us an opportunity to radically transform the way we provide and promote handwashing services and other related hygiene practices, in communities, schools and health care facilities.”

The Global Handwashing Day encourages action to promote and sustain handwashing habits. Thus, this year we will observe a month of action from today, with a blended format using social media, mass media, face to face events and capacity building trainings in all settings.

The Ministry of Health together with UNICEF and WHO is preparing a long-term country roadmap to ensure hand hygiene practices are sustained beyond Global Handwashing Day. Thus, communities should be supported to ensure that handwashing stations with enough water and soap are accessible and appropriate, provide inclusive behavior change programming, and advocate for handwashing to be included in policies and budgets to ensure hygiene for all.

About Global Handwashing Day

Every year on October 15th, millions of people celebrate Global Handwashing Day across the world through celebrations, events, and advocacy campaigns. The day was founded by the Global Handwashing Partnership in 2008 to help communities, advocates, and leaders spread the word about handwashing with soap. Global Handwashing Day not only seeks to raise awareness on the importance of handwashing with soap but provides a platform for sustained action at a global, regional, and national level.

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