



2023 FACT SHEET

GLOBAL HANDWASHING DAY

CLEAN HANDS ARE WITHIN REACH

Global Handwashing Day (GHD) is a global advocacy day dedicated to increasing awareness about the importance of hand hygiene and triggering lasting change from the policy-level to community-driven action.

Clean hands are within reach

This year's Global Handwashing Day theme explores hand hygiene at a systems level. While strides have been made, hand hygiene efforts must be tripled to achieve global targets. This requires focus not only on individual hand hygiene behavior, but also a broader effort to create an enabling environment that supports the scale up of hand hygiene within a local system. Achieving universal hand hygiene depends on the contributions of multiple and interconnected actors to enable hand hygiene access and practice at homes, schools, workplaces, health care facilities, and other community settings. Everyone has a role to play to ensure **clean hands are within reach**.

What are the benefits of hand hygiene?

Hand hygiene can help reduce the transmission of a range of diseases:

- Handwashing with soap can reduce diarrheal diseases by **30%**.
- Handwashing with soap can reduce acute respiratory infections by up to **20%**.
- Handwashing with plays an important role in reducing the transmission of outbreak-related pathogens such as **cholera, Ebola, shigellosis, SARS, hepatitis E, and COVID-19**.
- Hand hygiene is protective against **healthcare-associated infections** and reduces the spread of **antimicrobial resistance**.
- Hand hygiene may contribute to the reduction of **Neglected Tropical Diseases**.

Proper hand hygiene has also been linked to benefits beyond disease reduction, such as reduced rates of **school absenteeism** and improvements in wellbeing, dignity, and productivity.



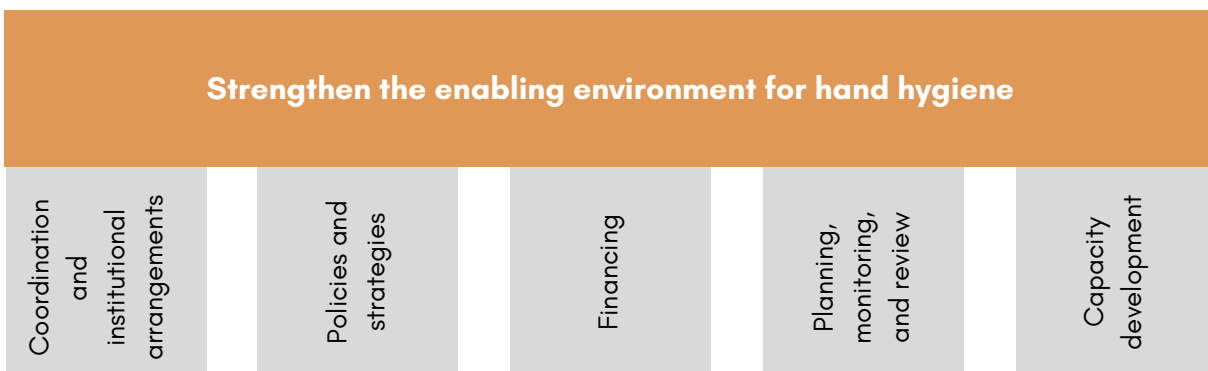
Key Messages

- Hand hygiene has many cross-cutting benefits. Advocates should share these benefits to show the impact of hand hygiene to decision makers to drive prioritization and investment.
- Advocates may use localized data and information when speaking to their decision makers. Connecting hand hygiene to an issue important to a country or community can provide a stronger case to generate progress.
- Think through benefits beyond health outcomes. Sharing benefits around the economic impact and/or impact to societal wellbeing, dignity and productivity may resonate with your decision makers more.

Addressing Hand Hygiene at a Systems Level

Despite its simplicity, hand hygiene is a complex issue and requires collaboration and coordination between multiple and interconnected actors across all levels of the **system** (national, state, community). Systems are made up of different “building blocks” that support hand hygiene. **Sanitation and Water for All (SWA)** describes the following building blocks as critical components of a strong hand hygiene system. This framework has been further adapted through the Global Handwashing Partnership’s **Handwashing Handbook**.

Figure 1. Sanitation and Water for All System Building Blocks





- **Building Block 1 - Coordination and institutional arrangements.** This building block describes the formal relationships and mechanisms for communication, collaboration, and coordination among the key actors in the country. These actors include the private sector, civil society organizations, faith-based organizations, funders, and government entities across different ministries, from the community to the national level.
- **Building Block 2 - Policies and strategies.** This building block includes the mechanisms by which a government sets out its vision (policy) and determines its plan of action (strategy) for hand hygiene. National policies should identify targets to improve handwashing infrastructure and provide guidance on strategies and institutional arrangements for achieving those targets.
- **Building Block 3 - Financing.** This building block highlights the need for realistic, transparent budgets with funding dedicated to hand hygiene. Countries with established national hygiene policies and plans should cost those plans and ensure that financial and human resource needs are met for the implementation of such plans.
- **Building Block 4 - Planning, monitoring, and review.** This building block includes systems for monitoring, evaluation, and review of national hand hygiene plans and targets. These systems should enable assessment of progress toward the uptake of hand hygiene and support planning for adjustments in programs to optimize scale-up. Countries may use tools, such as the [Hand Hygiene Acceleration Framework Tool](#), as part of these efforts.
- **Building Block 5 - Capacity development.** This building block supports the need for capacity building based on formative research, behavior change, and quality delivery and describes the need for development plans to address the capabilities of institutions to fulfill roles and responsibilities at scale, including the availability of necessary structures, tools, training, and incentives.

Reliant, resilient, and sustainable systems must be built to create an enabling environment in which hand hygiene can be practiced across homes, schools, workplaces, healthcare facilities and other community settings.

Key Messages

- Countries should adopt a systems approach to ensure clean hands are within reach. Understanding the different roles and responsibilities of the multiple actors within a system can further drive hand hygiene progress.
- Strong leadership requires addressing the different system building blocks to ensure a strong enabling environment for hand hygiene.



What can be done to address hand hygiene at a systems level?

Creating an Enabling Environment for Hand Hygiene

Creating a strong enabling environment starts with strong national strategies and plans for hand hygiene that bring different sectors and stakeholders together. While leadership should start with government, other stakeholders such as donors, academia, NGOs, civil society and the private sector, have an important role in leading the way for progress as well. These national strategies and plans provide clear institutional mechanisms for collaboration and systems for monitoring progress.

Most countries have national policies and plans for hygiene in place. Of the 109 countries surveyed for the 2020 **GLASS Report**, 79% reported having national policies for hygiene and 73% reported having a national plan for hygiene. However, **few countries** have sufficient financial and human resources to implement their national hygiene policies and plans, with only 9% of countries reporting sufficient funds to support their national plans. Financing must come jointly from governments, donors, and households, and discussions around financing should happen during the development process for policies and plans.

Through the **Hand Hygiene for All Initiative**, countries have committed to developing costed hand hygiene roadmaps, which serve as a country's action plan to accelerate hand hygiene progress. A current list of completed roadmaps and other policy examples are available **here**. In addition, countries have used the recently launched **Hand Hygiene Acceleration Framework Tool** to track their processes and assess the quality of national hand hygiene plans. This tool allows countries to identify barriers, opportunities, and priority actions around hand hygiene and drive investment to such plans.

Ensuring Equity in Hand Hygiene Access

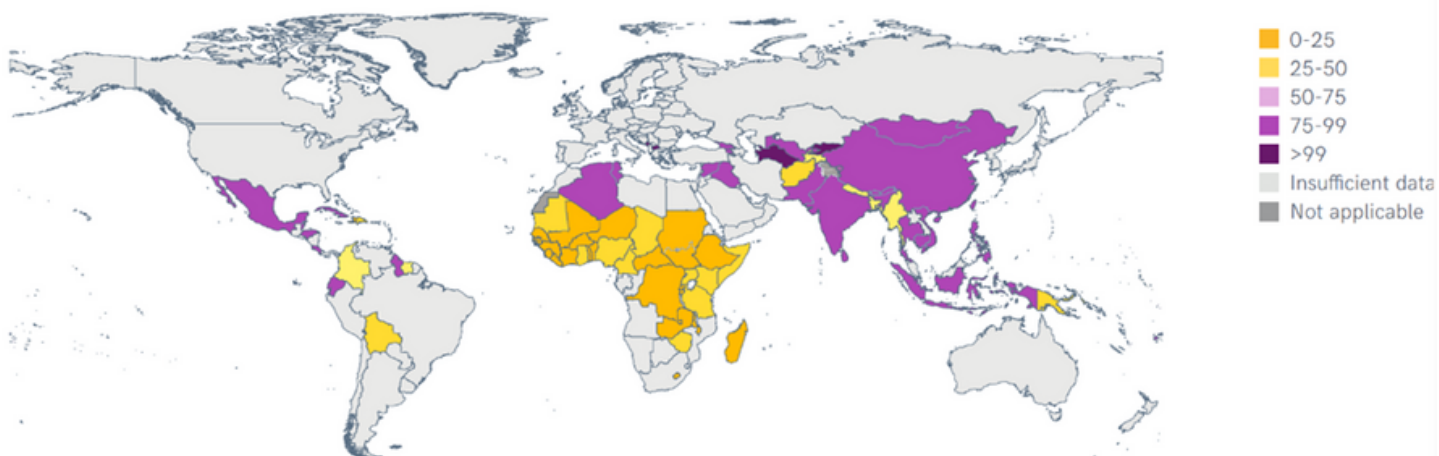
A large component of this year's theme, "Clean hands are within reach," is access to hand hygiene facilities. Globally, access to hand hygiene facilities and products remains severely inadequate. To enable hand hygiene practice, people **need access** to hand hygiene facilities that are **conveniently located and easy to use**. Research shows that people are more likely to wash their hands if they have soap and water present **near the handwashing facility**.



Progress for hand hygiene is monitored by the WHO/UNICEF Joint Monitoring Program for Water Supply, Sanitation and Hygiene ([JMP](#)). In their latest report, published earlier this year, the program notes that 2 billion people worldwide still lack access to basic hygiene services, including 653 million people without any handwashing facility at all. These latest estimates are based on data from 84 countries.

Figure 2. Map showing the proportion of population with basic hygiene services, 2022 (%), developed by the JMP.

In 2022, 84 countries had estimates available for basic hygiene services



Since 2015, basic hygiene services coverage has increased from 67% to 75%, rising more significantly in rural areas (from 53% to 65%) and remaining unchanged, at 83%, in urban areas. Out of the 84 countries included in the latest JMP report, only 11 countries are on track to achieve universal access by 2030, while 56 countries are progressing too slowly. Furthermore, 7 countries have decreased their rate of progress. Based on the latest estimates, no SDG region is on track to achieve universal access by 2030 and the overall rate of progress will need to triple to meet the SDG global targets.

While the JMP often highlights inequalities in service levels between and within countries, it is also important to note the disparities across population subgroups. It is widely noted that access to hygiene services impact women and men in different ways. This is partly due to specific needs (i.e., women and girls may need access to handwashing facilities for additional hygiene needs, such as menstrual health) as well as differences in gender norms and roles and responsibilities related to hygiene. Some indicators take account



for these gender inequalities, and some national data can be disaggregated by sex or gender; however, further work is needed to develop indicators that address the specific hygiene needs of women and girls.

Key Messages

- Progress must triple to meet the current targets set under the Sustainable Development agenda. While progress has been made, only one in seven countries are on track to achieve universal basic access to hygiene by 2030.
- Efforts should not only consider the disparities between countries, but also within subpopulations within a country to ensure no one is left behind.

Promoting Implementation at Scale

Designing, implementing, and evaluating hand hygiene behavior change programs requires a multi-faceted approach and achieving this at scale requires coordinated efforts among all stakeholders within the hand hygiene system. Promoting evidence-based hand hygiene behavior change programs as part of wider development issues is essential to achieving multiple development targets. The **Handwashing Handbook** provides further guidance for implementing hand hygiene programs at scale.

Forthcoming guidelines led by the World Health Organization and UNICEF will provide guidance to Ministries on best practices for community settings. These guidelines, set to be published in 2024, will provide evidence-based recommendations for global standards on minimum requirements for practicing effective hand hygiene in community settings; effective behavior change approaches to sustain effective hand hygiene practices; and a framework for government-led implementation of global standards and sustained behavior adoption. These guidelines can serve as a catalyst for better hand hygiene programs and practice in communities.

Key Messages

- Advocates must influence governments and other decision makers to prioritize and fund hand hygiene, whether through national strategies and plans or as part of broader development agendas.



What can you do to ensure clean hands are within reach?

Ensuring clean hands are within reach can only happen if all stakeholders work together. Any individual or organization can lead the way when it comes to hand hygiene. To ensure clean hands are within reach, we need:

- **Governments** to strengthen national hand hygiene efforts and track hand hygiene progress using the Hand Hygiene Acceleration Framework Tool
- **Donors** to increase and sustain financing to meet hand hygiene targets by investing in programs and national plans/strategies that are hygiene sensitive and promote hand hygiene habits
- **Businesses** to contribute toward resilient hand hygiene systems through partnerships, research, policies, financing, and innovation
- **Institutions** to use a multi-faceted approach to improve hand hygiene in schools, healthcare facilities, workplaces, and other institutional settings
- **Researchers** to conduct further research to fill hand hygiene evidence gaps, with focus on hand hygiene behavior change and return on investment from hand hygiene interventions
- **Advocates** to raise awareness on the importance of hand hygiene as an essential part of health and development

To learn more about our collective efforts to achieve clean hands for all, visit the Global Handwashing Partnership website [here](#).