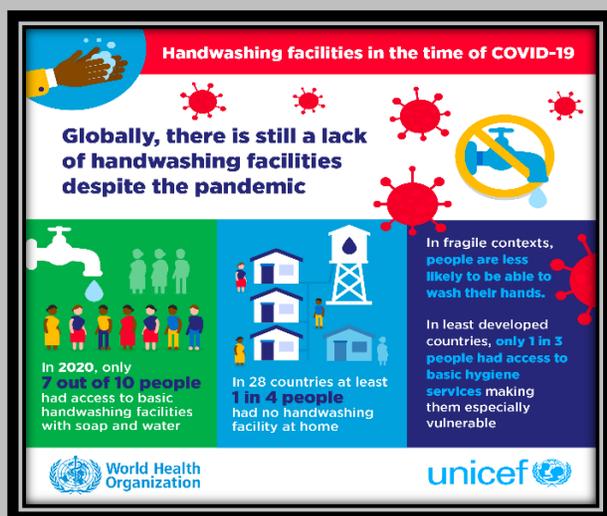


# HAND HYGIENE: A WAY TO PROTECT AGAINST A RANGE OF DISEASE

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**Hand hygiene** is one of the key measures to prevent the spread of infectious diseases, including bacterial, diarrheal, and respiratory diseases, such as COVID-19. Good hand hygiene is a cornerstone of safe and effective health care. It is a highly cost-effective public health measure that is also crucial to protecting against a range of diseases like pneumonia and diarrhea. Growing in a clean and safe environment is every child's right. Access to clean water, basic toilets, and good hygiene practices not only keeps children thriving, but also gives them a healthier start in life. Global and national estimates reflect huge inequalities in access to handwashing, even within countries. Millions of people still do not have access to hand hygiene facilities. According to global estimates 2.3 billion people lack handwashing facility with

water and soap at home in year 2020, including 670 million who have no handwashing facility at all. Between 2015-2020, 547 million people gained access to basic hygiene services at home. At this rate, 1.9 billion people will still lack basic hygiene services at home by the end of 2030. 818 million children lack a basic hygiene service at their school, of which 462 million attended schools with no hygiene service at all. 1 in 3 healthcare facilities does not have access to hand hygiene where care is provided. Almost 2 billion people depend on health care facilities without basic water services. It is estimated that half a million people die each year from diarrhea or acute respiratory infections which could have been prevented with timely and thorough hand hygiene. 700 children die every day from diseases linked to unsafe water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH).

Globally there is still a lack of handwashing facilities despite the deadly pandemic. According to global estimates of handwashing facilities in 2020, only 7 out of 10 people had access to handwashing facilities with soap and water and in 28 countries at least 1 person out of 4 had no facility of handwashing at home. Hand hygiene can prevent serious illness and death, especially for children. To eliminate the deficiencies in hand hygiene facilities progress must be 4 times faster in rural areas globally. For least developed countries this progress should increase by 7 times. Timely hand hygiene prevents up to 50 per cent of avoidable infections acquired during health care delivery, including those affecting the health workforce. Islamic ritual of washing known as "wudu" is a great source of

having good hygiene. Wudu is to be performed five times a day in a certain order-first wash your hands, then mouth, nose, face, hair, and ears, and finally ankles and feet. In the times of Covid-19, Islamic practices that emphasize purity of body could help reiterate the importance of basic hygiene along with the use of soap or hand sanitizer, to reduce one's vulnerability to the virus.

Achieving universal hand hygiene by 2030 in all domestic settings would cost US\$11 billion but yields health and economic benefits for everyone. Governments are the main stakeholders for ensuring everyone can practice good hand hygiene behaviors. Ensuring everyone can practice effective hand hygiene behaviors is everyone's business. Governments and others should show leadership and provide the necessary environment for actors to drive forward the progress needed. Investment in the following five key actions should be prioritized:

- Good governance through leadership, effective coordination, and regulation, including clear policies on handwashing services and behaviors in all settings.
- Assess current capacity with respect to their hand hygiene policy and strategies, identify gaps and develop capacity-building strategies based on the rigorous application of best practice.
- Governments should address the need for consistent data on hand hygiene to inform decision-making and make investments strategic.

- Governments and supporting agencies should encourage innovation, particularly on the part of the private sector, to roll out hand hygiene in all settings.

