

Handwashing Programs for Better Hygiene

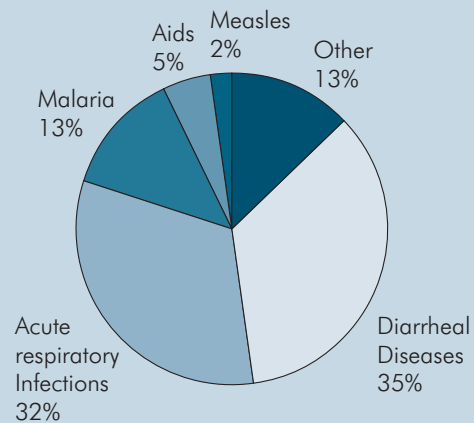
The *Handwashing Handbook* advocates handwashing-with-soap programs to fight the spread of disease. It covers the following components: laying the foundation for a National Handwashing Program; understanding the consumer; and implementing the program. The Handbook explains how to research consumer needs, communicate with target audiences, design appropriate and appealing messages, and implement a multi-channel promotional program.

Handwashing with soap can dramatically reduce the leading causes of child mortality. The vast majority of child mortality occurs among the world's poorest populations in low- and middle-income countries, with diarrhea and respiratory infections responsible for two out of three deaths (Figure 1). Handwashing with soap interrupts one of the main transmission routes of diarrhoea, respiratory infections, skin infections and trachoma. Soap plays a key role in stopping transmission; just washing with water has little or no effect. Studies have shown that handwashing with soap can reduce diarrheal incidence by almost half and respiratory infections by a third.

Despite the acknowledged benefits of handwashing, rates of handwashing with soap are very low. The challenge is to make it a habit—a social norm—on a worldwide basis. The new approach to changing handwashing behavior on a national scale draws on lessons from commercial marketing approaches and from public health strategies. Its core feature is a focus on the handwasher as the agent of change.

This note reports key messages from "The Handwashing Handbook: A Guide for Developing a Hygiene Promotion Program to Increase Handwashing with Soap." The guide was produced by the World Bank in collaboration with the Global Public Private Partnership for Handwashing with Soap. Readers may download the complete handbook from www.worldbank.org/water.

Figure 1. Chief causes of child deaths



Source: World Health Organization.

Creating a National Handwashing Program

Building a national handwashing program takes time, resources, effort, and commitment. The first step is to determine if a health need exists. How prevalent are the diseases linked to poor handwashing practices? How prevalent is handwashing? Experience has shown that the only feasible and reliable way to obtain a valid measure of handwashing practice is through direct observation from well trained and supervised field workers. Handwashing is critical at three junctures: after using the toilet; after cleaning a child; and before handling food.

The next step is to determine the interest and capacity of key stakeholder groups, such as government, the private sector (for example, soap manufacturers or other companies seeking to improve social well-being), aid donors, and other partners, such as nongovernmental organizations. The private sector can contribute marketing expertise and understanding of the consumer to promote appropriate products, as well as other resources and expertise. Partnerships between government and business (public private partnerships) are often the most effective way to forge a powerful national program.

To succeed, advocates will have to make the case for handwashing to government, the private sector, and potential funders. An analysis of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats can identify the factors that must be addressed when engaging stakeholders.

- *To make the case to government*, the scale of the health problem related to handwashing must be demonstrated and linked to government goals such as reducing poverty and the economic cost of disease.
- *The potential benefits to the private sector* include increasing sales, raising visibility, and improving political contacts. Attracting private sector support may mean addressing issues such as the use of branding in programs and the degree of exclusivity to be offered in return for support.
- *To obtain donor support*, it is important to determine donors' priorities, where decision-making authority lies, and the mechanisms for obtaining funding.

Financing is needed to cover the costs of program start-up, consumer research, and a mass media campaign. Financing mass media activities has been particularly challenging in several countries. A standardized methodology for the economic analysis of handwashing interventions can help the partnership conduct a persuasive cost-benefit analysis that will demonstrate the impact of handwashing in a broad context. To develop the program organization and ensure coordination among partners, it is helpful to jointly lay out an initial vision, expectations, commitments, partnership structures and milestones. A country coordinator or catalyst should be named (an individual or organization) to bring public and private partners together and provide drive, enthusiasm, and expertise in public health, management, and communications.

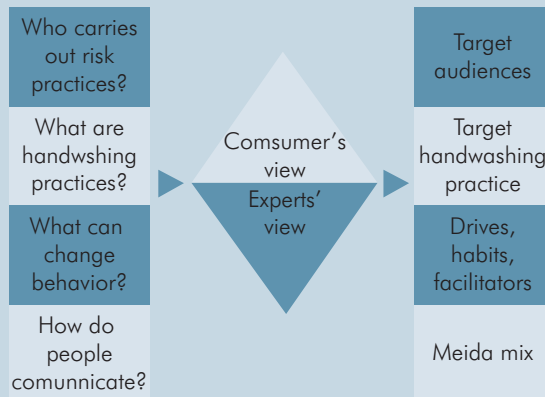
A Key Element: Understanding the Consumer

It is impossible to change long-held handwashing habits without a firm understanding of the factors that shaped those habits. A marketing approach looks at handwashers as "consumers" whose needs and perspectives determine the nature and scope of all promotion activities. The heart of the marketing task is thus to find out what consumers want and then to offer it to them in an appealing way. Consumer research provides a baseline for measurement and understanding of the target audience by answering four broad questions: Who engages in risky practices? What environmental factors encourage those practices, and what factors might change them? How do people communicate about health issues (Figure 2)?

Handwashing programs usually target mothers and caretakers of children under five years old as well as school-aged children. Sometimes secondary audiences—neighbors, fathers, and elder children—should be addressed because of their influence on the primary audience. To change behavior, three key interventions are involved:

- *Lowering barriers to facilitate change.* Analysis of quantitative surveys of basic environmental information—e.g. availability of soap, distance to water, and access to sanitation—can be complemented with in-depth interviews following behavior trials to help reveal barriers and facilitators.

Figure 2.
The consumer research process



Source: *The Handwashing Handbook*.

- *Transforming old habits into new.* Successful promotion will instill a habit that is triggered with every contaminating event. Habits are best documented using structured observations, in-depth interviews, and behavior trials for new habits.
- *Finding drivers that can create new habits.* Particular behaviors are motivated by drivers, both innate and learned. Country-specific research is needed to identify and understand which motivators are strong enough to anchor an effective marketing campaign.

Research must also determine where the target audience obtains information, the reach and trust level of different channels of communication, and the best languages to use. Existing data can be complemented with primary research to learn more about channels of communication from the mothers' perspective. Behavioral trials and focus group discussions with mothers and school children can deepen understanding of motivations and favored communication channels. A team with experience in commercial consumer research should manage and supervise research, while handwashing experts should provide advice, support the qualitative research work, and analyze results.

Program Implementation

Consumer research informs the design and implementation of the handwashing campaign, which is based on product, price, place, and promotion—the “Four Ps.” Promotion, the focus of the Handbook summarized here, requires thorough planning and the involvement of a professional communications agency that can turn the objectives and insights of marketers into a comprehensive campaign. A “creative brief” must be prepared, outlining the tasks to be accomplished, based on the findings of consumer research. The target audience must be segmented into groups with similar behaviors and needs, so that promoters can address the needs of each segment with different strategies. Messages must be tailored to each group. Messages and concepts must be tested and revised to ensure maximum success.

Successful handwashing programs rely on multiple strategies for behavior change executed through a variety of communication channels. Those channels include mass communications (TV, radio, bill-

boards); direct consumer contact (through public meetings, street theater, educational sessions in schools and health facilities); and communications through governments and partner agencies (schools and clinics, for example). The mix of communications channels should be laid out clearly in a public relations plan aligned with the broad communication effort. Each channel has its own advantages and disadvantages (Table 1).

Monitoring and evaluation are essential to ascertain the extent and effectiveness of the program. Monitoring involves three broad steps: a baseline survey, ongoing monitoring of program activities, and a post-intervention survey. Evaluation measures outcomes both during and after the intervention to determine the success of the program. It usually suffices to look for impact on behavior as proof that the program is achieving its objectives.

Program Organization

Public-private partnerships provide an effective model for handwashing programs because they combine the health objectives of the public sector with the marketing expertise of the private sector. However, when partners from different backgrounds are not accustomed to working together, it takes time to build common aims and mutual trust.

The experience of previous handwashing campaigns in Central America, Ghana, Nepal, and Senegal suggests that a coordinator-committee model for public-private partnerships is an effective way to manage a program with a diverse group of partners. The coordinator manages day-to-day operations, keeps stakeholders engaged and informed, and ensures that the whole initiative is moving toward its objectives. The steering committee includes the key stakeholders that provide resources. The consultative committee comprises stakeholders who have a specific interest in the program and can provide occasional feedback, advice, and approval on specific issues.

A business plan provides potential stakeholders with the justification for contributing and shows them where resources are needed. Evolving with the initiative, the business plan helps participants consolidate ideas and reach consensus. The first draft outlines the vision for the partnership; updated versions reflect participation of new partners and the completion of components.

Table 1. Advantages and Disadvantages of Different Approaches to Communication

Approach	Description	Advantage	Disadvantage
Mass media	Messages crafted to be transmitted through an optimized mix of radio, TV, billboard, and other channels	Low cost per capita, can be highly memorable, can raise the political profile of handwashing, easy to monitor	Needs high saturation (6+ contacts) to affect behavior change Audience cannot interact Difficult to fund
Direct consumer contact	Events organized by professional event management agencies, held in schools, public places, community groups	Good audience interaction, high impact, memorable	High cost per capita Uncertainty about impact and optimal size of audience
Public channels	Using the ability of government agencies to deliver handwashing messages through schools and health centers	Potentially highly sustainable, if handwashing promotion becomes part of curriculum, job description of health agent, promoted at ante- and post-natal contact	Hard to control Low staff motivation Contact with target audiences may be infrequent, resulting in low coverage Low ability to monitor activities

Source: *The Handwashing Handbook*.

Handwashing promotions and educational activities sponsored by the private sector can be linked to the national initiative. Such leveraging helps to ensure sustainability by tying handwashing messages to expanding soap brands. In 1998, Colgate-Palmolive launched a global education initiative known as “Clean Hands, Good Health.” From its initial base in the United States, the program has been expanded to millions of children in Asia, Latin America, and Africa. It now includes a structured school curriculum and community programs. Mexico’s “Safeguard” bar soap has run a multi-element campaign to promote handwashing among children. Safeguard provides expertise and materials, while the media, government institutions and educational partners reach people. Unilever’s *Swasthy Chetna* (Awakening to One’s Health) program uses multiple channels to promote everyday handwashing and bathing with soap in India. The goal is to reach 100 million people.

One drawback of public-private partnerships is that they can be slow to build and even slower to show results.

Building on Gains to Date

Although campaigns conducted to date have generated good outcomes and provided useful lessons, more clearly demonstrating the cost-effectiveness of handwashing programs will help improve acceptance. Research comparing the effectiveness of different approaches to generating behavior change will help optimize implementation. Clarifying roles and responsibilities among stakeholders will improve acceptance and sustainability. Often, hygiene does not have a single institutional home—to be sustained, programs need ownership in several sectors, notably water and sanitation, health, and education.

The Water Sector Board Practitioner Notes (P-Notes) series is published by the Water Sector Board of the Sustainable Development Network of the World Bank Group. P-Notes are available online at www.worldbank.org/water. P-Notes are a synopsis of larger World Bank documents in the water sector.

