

Hygiene promotion in emergencies

TECHNICAL NOTES ON DRINKING-WATER,
SANITATION & HYGIENE IN EMERGENCIES

Originally designed for print, this is one of the series of highly illustrated notes prepared by WEDC for WHO to assist those working immediately or shortly after an emergency to plan appropriate responses to the urgent and medium-term water, sanitation and hygiene needs of affected populations.



TN 10



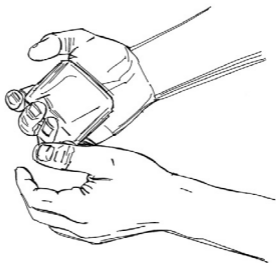
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Introduction

Communities affected by a disaster often lack basic water and sanitation facilities. They are likely to be traumatized and vulnerable to disease. Disruption of familiar practices or the relocation to new environments can result in a deterioration in existing hygiene behaviours. This, in turn, will contribute to an increased risk of disease transmission and epidemics.

This technical note explains why hygiene promotion is important in emergencies and describes how to carry it out. For further general information about hygiene promotion, refer to [Note 30: Hygiene promotion in WASH programmes.](#)

Preventing the spread of disease

Effective hygiene promotion is widely accepted to be one of the most valuable tools to reduce the burden of diarrhoeal diseases after a disaster. Hygiene

promotion is, nevertheless, given significantly less emphasis than other water supply and sanitation initiatives.

Hygiene promotion is a general term used to cover a range of strategies aimed to improve people's hygiene behaviour and so prevent the spread of disease. This note focuses on behaviour related to water supply and sanitation.

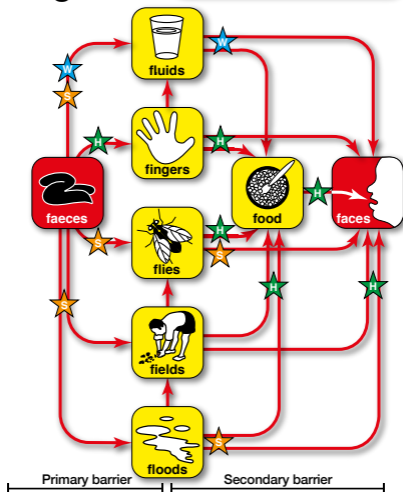
By creating a series of barriers to infection, hygiene behaviour has a critical influence on the transmission of water- and sanitation-related diseases as shown in Figure 1.

The most important practices to target are:

- the appropriate use and maintenance of sanitation facilities;
- the safe disposal of faeces;
- handwashing after defecation and before food preparation (see [Note 47: Handwashing with soap](#));

The 'f' diagram

★ WATER ★ SANITATION
★ HYGIENE



The movement of pathogens from the faeces of a sick person to where they are ingested by somebody else can take many pathways, some direct and some indirect. This diagram illustrates the main pathways. They are easily memorized as they all begin with the letter 'f': fluids (drinking water) food, flies, fields (crops and soil), floors, fingers and floods (and surface water generally).

Figure 1. Barriers to the transmission of disease from faeces

- use and proper storage of safe drinking-water (see Figure 2); and
- the control of flies, mosquitoes and other disease vectors.



Figure 2. Covered water containers for storage and dispensing

Minimum standards

Sphere sets out minimum standards for hygiene promotion in emergencies with a strong emphasis on community mobilization and participation.

They state that all facilities and resources provided should *reflect the vulnerabilities, needs and preferences of the affected population* and that users should be *involved in the management and maintenance of hygiene facilities where appropriate*.

Principles of hygiene promotion

1. **Target a small number of risk-reduction practices.** Target the behaviours most likely to directly reduce the spread of disease first. These are likely to include handwashing with soap and safe disposal of faeces.
2. **Target specific audiences.** Identify the community groups that have the largest influence on the changes

you wish to promote and target your promotion activities at them.

- 3. Identify the motives for changed behaviour.** People often change hygiene practices for reasons not directly related to health, such as a wish to gain respect from neighbours, or personal pride.
- 4. Use positive hygiene messages.** People learn best and can listen for longer if they are entertained and can laugh. Frightening people will stop them listening to you.
- 5. Identify the best way to communicate.** Traditional and existing channels of communication are easier to use and are usually more effective than setting up new ones.
- 6. Use a cost-effective mix of communication channels.** Using several methods of communicating with your audience reinforces the

message and improves acceptance. However, there will be a trade-off to consider between the cost of using multiple channels and the overall effectiveness of the campaign.

7. **Carefully plan, execute, monitor and evaluate.** Effective hygiene promotion is community-specific. Programmes must be designed to meet the needs of a particular community. This can only be achieved through careful planning, monitoring and evaluation of activities.

Planning hygiene promotion

Initial assessment

A rapid assessment is important for the development of the promotion campaign and to appraise improvements achieved. The key questions to be answered by the assessment are shown in Box 1 (towards the end of this note). In the first phase of an emergency a rapid assessment is all that can be undertaken. This may

consist of mapping the community to show the location of important features such as water sources, latrines and community facilities, an exploratory walk through the area and some focus group discussions with representatives of the affected community and representatives of key organizations.

Planning the promotion campaign

The main steps in developing a campaign are the following:

- **Set a goal.** The goal will usually be to improve the quality of life (or to reduce the loss of life).
- **Identify hygiene problems.** These should have been identified by your initial assessment.
- **Identify key behaviours linked to the problems.** These could relate to activities such as handwashing or excreta disposal but could equally be related to a poor understanding

of technology, or wrong attitudes to gender issues or the environment.

- **Determine the cause of the problems.** The more accurately the causes can be identified the easier it will be to target the campaign.
- **Prioritize actions.** Decide which problems to target first. This will depend on balancing the priorities for improving health with available resources.
- **Develop a strategy.** Decide which methods and tools you intend to use (see below).

Facilitators

Sphere suggests that there should be one hygiene promotion facilitator for every 1000 affected people. This number should be doubled during the early stages of an emergency response. There will not be sufficient time to recruit and train dedicated

facilitators for the immediate phase of an emergency, but much can be done with volunteers identified through pre-existing organizations such as faith-based groups, health care workers or extension workers. If possible, use facilitators from within the affected community as they will better understand the local difficulties and be accepted by the community.

Facilitators must be trained (see below).



Figure 3. Training of facilitators

Box 2 lists the topics that should be included in training, but they do not have to be covered all at once. Start with basic training in promotion techniques and provide short, regular programmes to gradually upgrade their skills.

Promotion tools and communication methods

- **Radio broadcasts.** An effective method of reaching a large number of people quickly. They should be brief, informative and entertaining with a memorable slogan or tune (jingle). Use a mix of voices in the form of a drama or interview.
- **Public address systems.** These can be used instead of radio broadcasts if the area to be covered is small or radios are unavailable. Use loudspeakers in key locations or a mobile system attached to a slow-moving vehicle

- **Posters.** Posters can be quickly and easily prepared, preferably in collaboration with the community. The main message should be displayed in the pictures, backed up by a few simple words in the local language. Test posters by showing them to members of the targeted community, checking whether they understand the message (see below).



Figure 4. Testing a poster or children

-
- **Drama and street theatre.** Drama is a powerful way of getting messages across. A simple story with

exaggerated characters and plenty of audience participation is ideal.

- **Puppet shows and games.** Puppet shows and games are an excellent form of communication when the target group is children. Highly interactive entertainment is likely to be most effective.
- **Slide, film and video presentations.** If appropriate visual materials and facilities to show them are readily available they can reach a large audience in a short time. Their impact can be enhanced by subsequent group discussions highlighting key points conveyed.
- **Focus group discussions.** A guided group discussion can improve understanding of current behaviour patterns and the reasons behind them (see Box 3).
- **One-to-one discussions and home visits.** This is a time consuming

option but very effective where skilled facilitators are used. They can work with individual families to develop specific practices to suit individual needs.



Figure 5. One-to-one discussion

Other practical actions

There is little point in persuading people to change their hygiene behaviour without the required tools and materials.

A water supply, basic sanitation, handwashing facilities with soap and food storage containers are all necessary before new hygiene practices can be adopted.

Boxes

Box 1. Key questions for a rapid hygiene assessment

- What are the most widespread risk behaviours in the community?
- How many in the community show these risk behaviours and who are they?
- Which risk behaviours can be altered?
- Who uses safe practices and what motivates and influences their use?
- What communication channels are available and which are reliable for promoting hygiene?
- What facilities or materials do people need in order to engage in safe practices?

- How much time, money or effort are people willing to contribute to have access to those facilities/materials?
 - Where will those facilities/materials be available?
 - How will the availability of these facilities/materials be communicated to people?
-

Box 2. Essential skills and knowledge required by facilitators

- Knowledge of health problems related to sanitation in emergency situations and appropriate prevention strategies.
- Understanding of traditional beliefs and practices.
- Knowledge of hygiene promotion methods targeted at adults and children.
- Understanding of basic health messages and their limitations.
- Knowledge of the appropriate use of songs, drama, puppet shows.

- Understanding of gender issues.
 - Knowledge of how to target various groups and especially vulnerable groups within the affected area.
 - Communication skills.
 - Monitoring and evaluation skills.
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Box 3. PHAST

PHAST (Participatory Hygiene and Sanitation Transformation) employs a range of tools to help communities understand the need for behaviour change and to act upon it.

PHAST is primarily a development approach but it has been used successfully in emergencies where communities have remained together.

See below for sources of further information.

Further information

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