



## A CLOSER LOOK: **HEALTH & HYGIENE**

BY PAUL DARILEK

### **WASH UP!**

The World Health Organization says the single most cost-effective health intervention in the world is handwashing with soap, which alone could cut incidence of diarrhea in half! <sup>1</sup>

This year WHO declared October 15 “Global Handwashing Day.” Handwashing with soap at critical times (before eating, after using the bathroom, etc) would save more lives than any single vaccine or medical intervention known to humankind, but it’s only very recently being seen as a life-saving opportunity. <sup>2</sup>

It sounds simple, but changing behavior is enormously difficult. LWI’s Jodi Mohny has been looking at this issue for years. Jodi’s interest in health and hygiene was born out of a passion for working with other moms. Her perspective was a great place to start because in the world of health, hygiene, and behavior modification, a knack for talking to moms can be worth more than an advanced degree in medicine.

LWI’s resulting health and hygiene course combines playful, memorable teaching techniques with tried-and-true hygiene practices appropriate for developing communities, and integrates the message of the gospel.

It is taught by trained short-term missionaries as well as by our in-country nationals. Some of our teams in Africa and Latin

America are even training others in their own countries to teach hygiene.



### **GERMS, TERROR, GLITTER.**

Germs kill many more people every day than terrorists do, but they don’t grab our attention. How do you teach people to be aware of something they can’t even see? One way is to put some glitter on your hand, then shake hands with someone. Then they shake hands with someone else. Next thing you know, the 10th person down the line has glitter on her hands. Now, you’re not just talking about disease transmission, you’re seeing how it happens.

### **BIG TEETH.**

Remember the dental hygienist who came to your elementary school? Remember those red tablets we chewed that stained the spots we didn’t brush? Well, that hygienist didn’t make it to the developing world. So we teach people on a larger-than-life set of teeth. We’re not sure what is so funny about brushing gigantic teeth, but people laugh and proper tooth brushing habits get seared into their memories.

### **DIARRHEA DOLL.**

Nobody forgets their time with the diarrhea doll. She’s a great way to illustrate how dehydration kills and what can be done about it. Nearly everyone in the world has a cheap and easy solution in their kitchen. The doll opens the door for teaching people how to concoct their own oral rehydration solution with clean water, salt, and sugar. Everybody remembers the recipe because they get to keep the specially-made measuring spoon. In the hygiene world, where highly memorable is better than highly technical, a little diarrhea doll goes a long way towards saving lives.

### **TIPPY TAP.**

When I was a missionary in the rural mountains of El Salvador, a physician came to our village and taught us all about washing our hands with soap. We listened attentively, but none of us started washing our hands—water was too scarce. Too bad we didn’t know how to make a tippy tap: a home-made hanging water-saving device (made from a plastic jug) complete with soap-on-a-rope. It’s ideal for handwashing when water is scarce.

### **WOMAN TO WOMAN, MOM TO MOM.**

Perhaps most importantly, the health and hygiene course is about building relationships. Day one consists of knocking on doors and making friends. For many traditional people groups, a physician in a doctor’s office may as well be from another planet. But motherhood connects women across any cultural line. So when moms see their kids laughing and playing, engaged in

*continued on back...*



games and crafts, they show up because they see that we care about their kids. It's important for the moms to be there; they have the biggest influence over household hygiene habits. It's important for the kids to learn the lessons the games teach; children more easily change their habits than adults, and are the most vulnerable to hygiene-related illness.

### LADIES?

LWI strives to involve women in teaching health and hygiene. Women in the developing world have enough men telling them what to do; they tend to feel more at ease among other women. It's important that they feel comfortable learning these lessons, because there are more lives to be saved through good hygiene practices than through the most advanced medical technologies in the world. The most important things to teach are often the simplest—like handwashing with soap. You can change the world. Register to take LWI's Health and Hygiene course (visit [www.water.cc](http://www.water.cc)), then sign up for a mission trip to go teach it. You'll make friends and find new people to love.



### 65,000,000,000 GERM-SPREADING FINGERS.

LWI is acutely aware of the need for hygiene training as a mortality reducer—there are, after all, 13 billion hands and 65 billion germ-spreading fingers in the world. We're constantly learning new ways to communicate these important lessons to the people we serve, and are excited to see the program expanding into new countries every year.

Teaching hygiene is also a chance to share our faith. Biblical truths are integrated into the course, and people experience our Lord who motivates us to serve others. The love he taught us 2,000 years ago might be the only eternal component in all our work. Our wells and tippy taps may not be here in a thousand years, but you can be sure that the love we share will be passed along. 💧



**Top Left:** While in Sierra Leone, LWI volunteer Lael Kucera used the diarrhea doll to demonstrate what dehydration does to the human body. **Top Right:** Sudanese women use a tippy tap to wash their hands. **Middle:** Severely malnourished twins in Sierra Leone were given a life-saving dose of a homemade oral rehydration solution. **Above:** Though hard to see, this Salvadoran boy's hands are covered with glitter, which represents germs.

1. Lorna Fewtrell, Kaufmann R.B., Kay D., Enanoria W., Haller L., dan Colford J.M.C., Jr 2005. "Water, sanitation, and hygiene interventions to reduce diarrhea in less developed countries: A systematic review and meta analysis." *The Lancet Infectious Diseases*, Vol. 5, Issue 1:42-52. Also, Curtis, V. and Cairncross, S. 2003. "Effect of washing hands with soap on diarrhoea risk in the community: A systematic review." *The Lancet Infectious Diseases*, Vol.3, May 2003, pp 275-281. • 2. Lorna Fewtrell et al.