



Press release

MILLIONS OF CHILDREN IN 20 COUNTRIES ACROSS 5 CONTINENTS WILL JOIN HANDS TO ENCOURAGE HANDWASHING WITH SOAP ON THE FIRST-EVER GLOBAL HANDWASHING DAY (15 OCTOBER 08)

From Egypt to India, China to Peru, Ethiopia to Indonesia, playgrounds and classrooms, local communities and big cities, will be buzzing on **Global Handwashing Day (15 October 2008)** with high profile awareness-raising and educational activity to accelerate handwashing behaviour change on a scale never seen before.

Every 20 seconds, a mother mourns a dead child lost to diarrhoea - a completely preventable and utterly inexcusable cause of death. But the problem can be saved. A simple hygiene habit – washing hands with soap – can save lives. During 2008, the inaugural Global Handwashing Day will help take this often overlooked hygiene challenge to the forefront of the international agenda. Global Handwashing Day will support the goal that World Water Week has set for 2008 during the International Year of Sanitation: to build a clean and healthy world.

Global Handwashing Day aims to promote improved hygiene practices, globally and locally, and draw attention to the world's enormous sanitation challenge. Handwashing plays an important part in the efforts to reach the Millennium Development Goals relating to health improvements, education, and the reduction of poverty and child mortality, as well as access and effective use of water supply and sanitation services agreed to by UN member countries at the World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg in September 2002. Stepping up investment in handwashing will be crucial to meet the child health targets set by the UN.

Spearheaded by a high profile coalition – **UNICEF; USAID; Centers for Disease Control and Prevention; Water and Sanitation Program; Unilever; and Procter and Gamble** – the inaugural Global Handwashing Day puts this often overlooked hygiene challenge at the forefront of the international agenda. This year, Global Handwashing Day will focus on school children as agents of change and create fusion and full commitment of schools, homes and communities to maximise outreach to children all over the world.

Diarrhoea is both preventable and treatable, yet families in developing countries continue to pay the price of this disease in lost lives, missed school days, reduced resistance to infections, impaired growth, malnutrition, and poverty. When coupled with educational initiatives, **handwashing with soap is one of the world's most cost-effective preventative health intervention** and has been proven to reduce the risk of not only diarrhoea, but also some of its more severe manifestations, such as cholera and dysentery, by 48-59%.

On Global Handwashing Day - 15 October – children, school teachers, and parents will join celebrities, government officials, NGO ambassadors, and members of the private sector to call for proper hygiene practices across the world and raise awareness that handwashing with soap is a powerful public health intervention.

The coalition behind the Global Handwashing Day is an alliance of public and private partners who together form the **Public-Private Partnership for Handwashing** (www.globalhandwashing.org), an international initiative to promote handwashing with soap to reduce diarrhoea in developing countries and implement large-scale handwashing interventions

by combining the expertise and resources of the soap industry with the facilities and resources of governments.

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For further information, please contact:

www.globalhandwashingday.org

Notes to Editors:

The first-ever Global Handwashing Day will take place on Wednesday, October 15, 2008. The UN General Assembly has designated 2008 the International Year of Sanitation, and Global Handwashing Day will echo and reinforce its call for improved hygiene practices. Global Handwashing Day will be the centerpiece of a week of activities that will mobilize millions of people in more than 20 countries across five continents to wash their hands with soap.

For more information about Global Handwashing Day, please go to:

www.globalhandwashingday.org. All materials on the website are available to be downloaded, or can be used in publication.