

SANITATION AND DIARRHEAL DISEASE

PATH developed these messages for use by anyone interested in communicating the impact of sanitation—and often the lack of it—on the health and development of children and families around the world. These messages are comprehensive and not intended to be used all at once, but rather provide options for communicating to a variety of audiences and in relation to a variety of topics.

Millions of children's lives have been saved by protecting them against diarrheal disease, yet it remains a leading killer of children under five years of age worldwide. By raising awareness about integrated prevention and treatment solutions, we can save millions more. Sanitation is a key prevention tool for protecting communities from the viruses and bacteria that cause diarrheal disease and other illnesses. Despite global progress, sanitation gaps still place a great burden on developing countries and their children, in particular. Awareness and advocacy can help ensure safe sanitation for all.

Primary resource: [Progress on Sanitation and Drinking Water: 2015 Update and MDG Assessment](#)

THE BURDEN

- Worldwide, 2.4 billion people do not have a safe and healthy place to “go.” One in every 3 people has no access to improved sanitation.
- Nearly 1 billion people worldwide still practice open defecation. It is one of the starkest representations of extreme poverty and remains a major contributor to the spread of diarrheal disease.
- The vast majority of people without access to appropriate, healthy sanitation live in sub-Saharan Africa, East Asia, and Southern Asia. Southern Asia alone accounts for more than 40% of the global population without improved sanitation.

THE CONSEQUENCES

- Safe water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) are essential to good health. WASH interventions are critical for preventing the leading disease threats to child health – diarrheal disease and pneumonia – in addition to other deadly health problems.
- Limited sanitation and open defecation amplify the transmission of pathogens, leaving children vulnerable to repeated diarrhea infections. With weakened systems, children cannot absorb nutrients essential to their development, leading to physical and cognitive shortfalls.
- Poor sanitation, repeated diarrhea episodes, and malnutrition form a vicious cycle that not only harms children's health but also drains family budgets, pushing many into poverty.
- Women and girls disproportionately carry the burden of inadequate sanitation. Without appropriate sanitation, many girls do not attend school during their menstrual cycles and often stop attending school altogether.
- Women and girls also are vulnerable to dangerous attacks in their search for a private place to go.

THE SOLUTIONS

- We can overcome poor sanitation and its consequences. Since 1990, strong political will has translated into focused efforts, improving sanitation for more than 2 billion people.
- Since 1990, open defecation has significantly declined in the least developed countries, from 45 percent of the population practicing open defecation in 1990 to 20 percent in 2015.
- Countries like Ethiopia and Bangladesh have set the standard. In 1990, 92 percent of Ethiopia's population practiced open defecation, but this dropped to only 29 percent by 2015—a five-fold reduction compared to the regional average. In Bangladesh, open defecation dropped from 42 percent in 2003 to 3 percent in 2014.
- The UN 2015 Sustainable Development Goal aims to achieve access to adequate and equitable sanitation and hygiene for all and an end to open defecation by 2030, with special attention to the needs of women and girls and those in vulnerable situations. Sustained advocacy and political will are essential to meeting this milestone.
- “Improved sanitation” facilities ensure hygienic separation of human excreta from human contact: flush or pour/flush toilets, ventilation improved pit [VIP] latrines, or composting toilets.