

EVENT SNAPSHOT

Understanding Hygiene Behavior and Hygiene Behavior Change

Event Details

Date and Time

1 October, 3:00–4:00 p.m.
(Manila time)

Venue

Zoom

Related water subthemes

x	Water supply, sanitation, and wastewater		Flood/drought risk management and disaster resilience
	Irrigation and productivity		Water governance and finance
	IWRM, storage, water-food-energy nexus	x	Water and health

With more than half of 2020 spent under the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic already, proper hand hygiene has become mainstreamed, if not ingrained, into public consciousness. Access to and sustainability of water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) services are vital to protect human health.

Robert Dreibelbis, Associate Professor at the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine (LSHTM), presented the latest research and evidence on hygiene promotion as a critical and specialist area. He specifically delved into the attributes of hygiene behaviors and how they compare and differ from other health behaviors. For instance, he emphasized that handwashing is universal and that hygiene behaviors are embedded in our evolutionary past, unlike a new health behavior during the pandemic, that of wearing a mask. As a result, promoting handwashing and sustaining behavior change may require a different approach.

Dr. Dreibelbis also focused on the hand hygiene program process and its implications to programming at scale. Part of an effective program, he said, is addressing infrastructural barriers, particularly the lack of access to water supply and handwashing facilities for millions of people around the world. He pointed out that COVID-19 has put a spotlight on where people gather, and as such, programs should also consider handwashing facilities outside the home, whether in schools, prisons, refugee camps, among others.

To sum up, Dr. Dreibelbis introduced the LSHTM-based COVID-19 Hygiene Hub, a partnership developed by individuals from LSHTM, the Centre for Affordable Water and Sanitation Technology (CAWST), and the Wash'Em team. The Hub is a core partner of the Hand Hygiene for All Global Initiative, co-led by WHO and UNICEF.

This webinar, which gathered over 70 participants (including Manila Water's Perry Rivera), was organized by the Water and Health advisory team, and is part of the ongoing work to upscale an integrated WASH and health approach in ADB operations.

Key Takeaways

Hygiene behaviors are influenced by a wide range of factors, including psychological processes, emotional reactions, habits and routines, and the physical and social environment. Emotions and motivations have often been under-used in changing behaviors related to handwashing with soap (HWWS). Considering these have been effective in a program in India, where the feelings of nurture and disgust were used to influence behavior, and even positioned the use of soap as a sign of modernity and progress.

COVID-19 has pushed people’s awareness and understanding of hygiene to the forefront; but, the barrage of messaging needs to evolve to result in lasting change. Over the course of the pandemic, people reach or have reached message saturation and there is a risk that messages fade into the background. Because of this, hygiene behaviors that increased in the early period of the COVID-19 crisis may start to decline. This underscores how hygiene behaviors are very dynamic, and ensuring behavior change is a process and not a singular event.

In changing hygiene behaviors, traditional approaches to hygiene behavior change (education-based messaging) are limited, because they do fail to address the wide range of factors that influence hygiene behaviors. Modern theory-based approaches to hygiene behavior change provide an alternative, evidence-based approach to hygiene programming. This process of developing an evidence-based and context-adapted hand hygiene program has three main steps: (i) defining behaviors, target populations, and setting; (ii) learn from populations about behavioral barriers; and (iii) defining behavior change techniques and delivery channels.

Specificity is key and interventions must be specific, measurable, and actionable to be effective. Specific behaviors should be targeted rather than a broad concept. This can include increasing frequency of handwashing, duration, use of soap, among others. It is also important to keep strategies surprising and engaging, since handwashing is a long-standing existing behavior. Use infrastructure to enable behaviors, as well as creative cues to prompt and/or reevaluate behavior. Strategies and messaging have to evolve over time.

Cost effective does not mean cheap nor easy. Implementing hygiene behavior change is a complex undertaking and we must invest adequate time and resources, especially in view of the broader water and sanitation infrastructure investments.

Resources are available to help expand HWWS and hygiene programming, and to sustain behavior change. The COVID-19 Hygiene Hub is an online platform that provides a range of resources to help stakeholders design, adapt, and share evidence-based hygiene programming. ADB project officers and others in the water community are welcome to [share](#) their own COVID-19-related hygiene programs in the Hygiene Hub’s online map of interventions. A technical team is also accessible through the website’s chat function.

**“Our hygiene behaviors are very dynamic, and related to the context we’re in
and the messaging we’re exposed to.”**

— Robert Dreibelbis

About the Speaker



Robert Dreibelbis

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Dr. Robert Dreibelbis, an associate professor at LSHTM and a principal investigator for the COVID-19 Hygiene Hub, is currently engaged in research focusing on the design and evaluation of hygiene behavior change interventions in households and institutional settings.

Related ADB Project

Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) and Water-related Health [COVID-19]

This is a new ADB-wide Water Sector Group and Health Sector Group initiative coordinated by Dr. Coral Fernandez Illescas, Principal Water Resources Specialist in the Sustainable Development and Climate Change Department at ADB, cfernandezillescas@adb.org

Related Resources

COVID-19 Hygiene Hub

<https://hygienehub.info/en/covid-19>

How to share a project in the COVID-19 Hygiene Hub

https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSdoon6pXY6blotsiL3Ta7aHKlywU7F6iCUDDFgzVeBzvCg_CQ/viewform

On promoting handwashing with soap in water- and soap-scarce settings

<https://resources.hygienehub.info/en/collections/2238373-handwashing>

To understand the state of hygiene policy and financing: UN-Water Global Analysis and Assessment of Sanitation and Drinking-Water (GLAAS) 2019 Report

https://www.who.int/water_sanitation_health/publications/glaas-report-2019/en/

To learn more about specific gaps in hand hygiene behavior during COVID-19

<https://resources.hygienehub.info/en/articles/4151177-summary-report-on-the-process-for-designing-effective-behaviour-change-projects-for-covid-19-prevention>

On methods that can be used and adapted to learn about a range of behaviors

<https://www.lshtm.ac.uk/sites/default/files/2017-03/BCD%20Formative%20Research%20Protocols%20v1.1.pdf>

On learning from past outbreaks and how behavior changes during outbreaks

<https://resources.hygienehub.info/en/collections/2240472-changing-hygiene-behaviours-in-outbreaks>

On monitoring and evaluation

<https://resources.hygienehub.info/en/collections/2403512-monitoring-and-evaluation>