

# DIARRHOEAL DISEASE

Contributing to 272 million lost school days per year<sup>1</sup>, diarrhoea has an enormous impact on family life, healthcare systems and society around the world. More children die per day due to diarrhoeal diseases than from AIDS, malaria and measles combined<sup>2</sup> yet simple hygiene practices both at home and at school can help to break the chain of infection.

## KEY FACTS

**HANDWASHING WITH SOAP HAS BEEN SHOWN TO REDUCE THE INCIDENCE OF DIARRHOEAL DISEASE BY OVER 40%**<sup>4</sup>

**DIARRHOEA IS THE LEADING CAUSE OF MALNUTRITION IN CHILDREN UNDER FIVE YEARS OLD**<sup>3</sup>

**MORE CHILDREN DIE PER DAY DUE TO DIARRHOEA THAN FROM AIDS, MALARIA AND MEASLES COMBINED**<sup>5</sup>

## WHAT IS DIARRHOEA?

Diarrhoea is a symptom of a gastrointestinal infection by a range of bacteria, viruses or parasites. Diarrhoea is defined as the passage of three or more loose or liquid stools per day. Other symptoms gastrointestinal infection include stomach cramps and vomiting. More severe cases of diarrhoeal disease are associated with weight loss, fever, blood in the stools (dysentery) and dehydration. Most deaths from diarrhoea are caused by severe dehydration and fluid loss.

A child with diarrhoeal illness may be infectious a few days before getting sick and for a couple of days after the diarrhoea has ended.

## WHAT ARE THE CAUSES?

In developing countries the infections that cause diarrhoea are principally caused by drinking faecally contaminated water, but also by eating contaminated food and spread person-to-person as a result of poor hygiene. Infections by rotavirus and *E.coli* are the most common cause of diarrhoea in developing countries.

In Europe and North America the most common cause of diarrhoeal disease in young children is also rotavirus. The virus is spread rapidly through person-to-person contact and by hand to mouth contact via contaminated surfaces such as toys.

## HOW CAN I AVOID IT?

In addition to ensuring people including young children only eat properly cooked food and drink only clean safe water, good hygiene practices can help interrupt the spread of diarrhoeal disease via hands and surfaces.



### Practice good hand hygiene

Children (and adults) should wash their hands with soap and clean running water after using the toilet, changing the baby's nappy and before eating. If soap and water are not available use a hand sanitizer, but remember hand sanitizer use by children should always be supervised by an adult.



### Good kitchen hygiene

Ensure food preparation surfaces and areas used to prepare bottles/baby feed are cleaned and disinfected before and after use. Kitchen utensils should be cleaned after use, and frequently touched surfaces should be cleaned and disinfected regularly.



### Clean toys regularly

Hard toys should be cleaned and then disinfected with a suitable disinfectant. Soft toys should be laundered on a hot wash (greater than 60°C) or at a lower temperature using a laundry disinfectant.

