

More than 3 million children under 5 years old will die from infectious diseases next year

New global report highlights 5 small steps to improve hygiene practices and reduce the burden of infectious diseases in children worldwide

The “Small Steps for Big Change” report, commissioned by The Global Hygiene Council (GHC) is published today, highlighting the alarming burden of preventable infectious diseases in children worldwide and calls for a simple 5-step plan to be implemented by families, communities and healthcare professions to improve everyday hygiene practices and stop children dying from preventable infections.

There has never been a greater focus on the health and wellbeing of children, yet every day, the health of the world’s children is under attack from common infectious diseases which could be prevented through improved hygiene practices. According to Professor John Oxford, Emeritus Professor of Virology at the University of London and Chair of the GHC, “It is unacceptable that largely preventable infections such as diarrhoea are still one of the biggest killers of children globally.”

The report states that more than 3 million children under the age of 5 years die from infectious diseases each year,¹ almost a million children die from pneumonia each year,¹ and more than 700,000 children under the age of 5 years die as a result of diarrhoea.² The report also demonstrates the current complacency regarding hygiene practices with over half of families (52%) not increasing surface disinfection at home during the cold and flu season³ and that 31% of reported foodborne outbreaks occur in private homes⁴.

“Poor personal hygiene and home hygiene practices are widely recognised as the main causes of infection transmission for colds, influenza and diarrhoea,” explains Professor Oxford. “Handwashing with soap has been shown to reduce diarrhoeal deaths by 50% and by developing this 5-step plan, we want to deliver a clear and consistent message about how small changes in hygiene practices could have a big impact on the health and wellbeing of children around the world.”

The 5-step plan has been developed by GHC experts, spanning paediatricians, infectious disease specialists, and public health experts from the UK, France, the USA, Nigeria, and South Africa. The 5-steps focus on making small changes such as improved hand hygiene and preventing the spread of infection causing germs in the home and wider community. The potential big changes that might result include halving the incidence of diarrhoea and

¹<http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs178/en/>

²<http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs330/en/>

³ Global Hygiene Council. Making Common Infections Uncommon Study 2015

⁴ <http://www.ifh-homehygiene.org/books/simple-guide-healthy-living-germy-world/module-7-why-hygiene-still-so-important>

reducing the incidence and burden of common infections such as, gastroenteritis, colds and influenza in babies and children.

Professor Oxford adds; “Families, communities and healthcare professionals need to acknowledge that improved hygiene is effectively a first line of defence and that adopting better hygiene practices could have a dramatic and positive impact on the lives of young children worldwide.”

To view the 5 Small Hygiene Steps for Big Change animation see:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tN8Em-QYF50>