



CHILDREN'S FAECES AND HYGIENE

THE IDEA

Diarrhoea, worms, cholera, typhoid, polio and some other diseases are caused by germs present in faeces. These germs can pass from one person to another on the hands, in dust, in food and drinks. Getting rid of faeces in a safe way, and handwashing after defaecation, contact with faeces, before touching food and before eating, can help prevent the spread of these diseases.

Diarrhoea is dangerous

Children have diarrhoea when they pass frequent, watery faeces. They may also vomit and have a swollen belly with cramps. Diarrhoea is caused by germs which live in dust, stale food, dirty water, and human faeces. These are so small that they are invisible. Through the diarrhoea, the body tries to 'wash out' and get rid of the bad germs.

Diarrhoea is a frequent cause of death in young children. They die from dehydration when they lose large amounts of fluid (water and salt) from their bodies because of the diarrhoea, and this is not replaced.

How to tell when a child is dehydrated and how to prepare rehydration drinks to replace fluids lost is described in Activity Sheet 6.1

Caring for Children with Diarrhoea.

Diarrhoea can often be prevented by proper feeding (see Activity Sheet 2.1 **Feeding Young Children**). But the most important



way we can help to prevent diarrhoea and other dangerous diseases is by keeping ourselves, and the places where we live and play, clean.

Faeces are dangerous

Many people know that faeces are dirty, but they may not know that the germs in faeces can cause diseases. Diarrhoea, worms, cholera, typhoid and polio are spread when

Where and how these activities have been used

All health programmes emphasise sanitation but not all have found methods of involving children in ways which are interesting and amusing as well as useful. This sheet on young children's faeces does this. Here children can present new knowledge 'we learnt at school' which is almost certainly not known by parents and other children.

ASK THE QUESTION: We all know that adults' faeces have dangerous germs in them – but what about young children's faeces? Are they: The same as adults' faeces? Less dangerous? More dangerous?

Check the sheet for the answer. Did you know it? How many others got it right? Once children understand the problem, there are many kinds of action they can take at home or together at school. Doing this for younger children makes them much more conscious of their own hygiene.

ACTIVITY SHEET 3.3

CHILD-TO-CHILD TRUST

germs are passed from our faeces to hands and clothes, to the water we drink and the food we eat, making us ill.

By using latrines, by keeping our hands and bodies clean after a bowel movement, and by cleaning up any faeces which are dropped in places where we live and play, we can help to prevent the germs that cause these diseases from spreading.

Why children's hygiene is important

Many people think that children's faeces are harmless, but this is wrong. A child's faeces has perhaps five or six times as many germs as the faeces of an adult. When the small child has diarrhoea, the faeces is especially dangerous for all members of the family.

- Babies have no control over their bowels and may pass their faeces in many different places, both inside and outside the house. This is not only dirty but very dangerous because germs from these faeces can spread easily to the rest of the family and neighbours.
- When they are older (about two to three years) and have learnt control of their bowels, children will copy what they see others doing. If they see others in the family defaecate in the field or in the garden, or squat in an alley or by the side of the road, they will copy them because all children want to grow up and be like others.
- Young children spend a lot of time crawling and sitting on the ground. They often put things into their mouths. And so they pick up germs in the dust from any faeces that are lying on the ground around them.
- It is very easy for anyone taking care of a young child to spread germs from faeces. After wiping a child's bottom, germs can be spread on our hands to food, cooking dishes, the furniture, clothing or the hands of other people. These germs can end up by getting into the mouths of other children or adults, and making them ill.



What can we do to stop the spread of germs?

Children can learn good hygiene habits which prevent the spread of germs causing diarrhoea and other illnesses. Older children can discuss effective preventive measures.

Use a latrine

Whenever possible, use a latrine for bowel movements, and not the field or compound. Help younger children to use the latrine properly. Cover the latrine hole, keep the latrine clean. When a latrine is not available, faeces should be buried to avoid germs being spread.

Keep hands and bodies clean

Use soap and water or ash and water to wash hands after contact with faeces, before touching food or eating, and before feeding young children. Rinsing the fingers with water is not enough – both hands need to be rubbed with soap or ash as well. If leaves have been used for wiping the bottom, or a cloth that cannot be washed, bury them or throw them in the latrine. Clean a child's bottom and hands if they are dirty.



Keep the place clean

Clean up and bury faeces dropped on the floor or in the yard. As often as possible (even four times a day) check to see that the places where young children play, crawl and sit are clean. Wash spoons, dishes and things that young children have played with.

Remember:
**USE A LATRINE AND WASH YOUR HANDS
 WITH SOAP AND WATER OR ASH AND
 WATER.**

How can we improve young children's hygiene?

Older children can help young children to learn good, clean bowel habits.

Teach younger ones to use a latrine

Where there is a latrine, the older child can encourage the small one to say when he or she needs to go. The older child can then take the younger one to the latrine.

If there is no latrine, older children can help young ones learn to pass their faeces in the right places by taking them with them to the woods, the fields or elsewhere to relieve themselves.

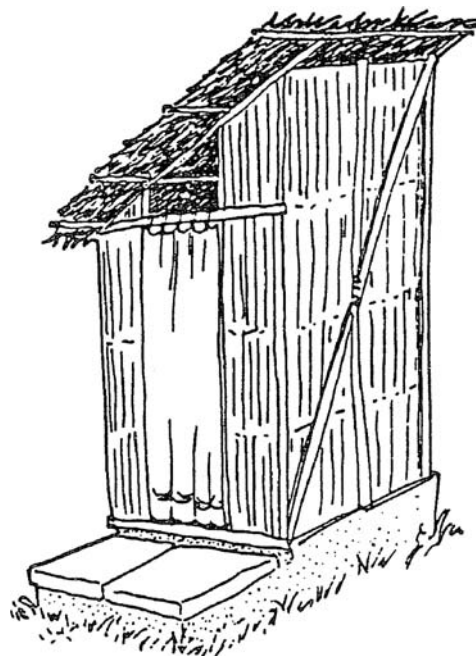
Encourage good hygiene habits such as:

- cleaning the bottom.
- washing hands with soap and water or ash and water after using the latrine.
- covering the latrine hole to keep flies away.
- closing the door of the latrine after use.

For girls it is particularly important that they wipe themselves properly after passing faeces. If a young girl wipes her bottom with a forward movement, there is a risk that a part of the faeces will be taken to where it can enter the body and even reach the bladder. This is an important cause of bladder infection in young girls. If she wipes backward, some of the faeces may be left on the young girl's bottom, from where her clothes may become soiled. It is best to wipe only very gently, and neither too far forward, nor too far backward.

Provide a suitable latrine

When a household has one latrine, it is often made for adults. It is some distance from the house; the foot plates are far apart; and the hole is too large, too dark, and too deep for a small child. It is a dark and frightening place for small children, even if an older child goes with them. They would rather pass their faeces in a corner of the house or just outside the door, where there is light and the security of having someone older nearby.



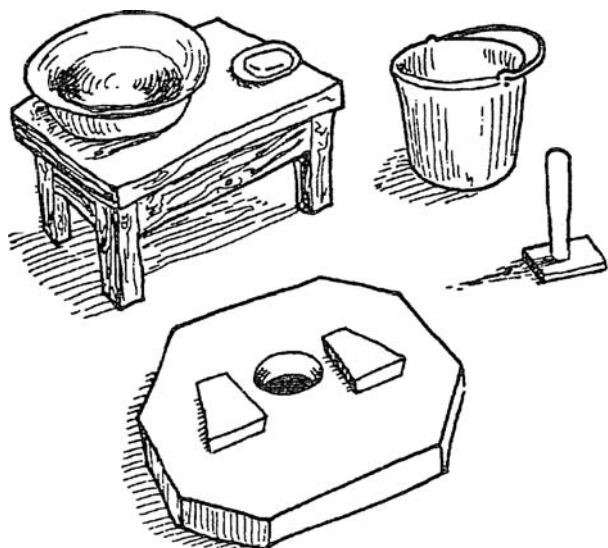
Remember: No one likes to use a latrine which is dirty and which smells. Keep latrines clean and well ventilated.

Small children need a latrine built specially for them. It should have a small foot plate, with a small hole, and be near the house.

ACTIVITY SHEET 3.3

CHILD-TO-CHILD TRUST

A child's latrine can easily be built. Here is a picture of the kind of latrine that is suited to young children.



The hole is about 1.5 m deep. The plate is about 2 m wide, about a metre long, and about 4 cm thick. The hole is no more than 10 cm in diameter. The latrine can be located in the courtyard beyond the back door of the house. A wooden cover is kept over the hole. After each use, a small amount of water is used to wash off the plate so as to avoid attracting flies.

A basin and soap or ash are nearby so that someone can clean the children after they use the latrine, or show them how to wash their hands after cleaning their bottom. The latrine will last for two to three years before the pit fills up. When it does, a new pit can be dug, if there is still a small child in the house.

But even if a child's latrine is not built there are ways of helping to keep children's faeces safe. Children can be taught to defaecate on a banana leaf which can be immediately dropped into the adult latrine.

Activities

Discuss Talk about the way to teach younger children to keep clean and use the latrine, and why this is important.

Older children can discuss some things which help the germs to spread. Examples would be:

- Taking a piece of cloth, wiping the bottom, and leaving the cloth lying around.

- Simply holding the child out bare-bottomed over the floor or the ground.

Practise good hygiene Practise good habits at school: use the latrine; keep it clean; keep hands clean after using the latrine; wash hands before taking food.

Why do some children not use a latrine? Ask them to explain. Discuss these reasons and agree on ways of encouraging use of the latrine.

Form a group to make regular inspections of the latrines. The group could check that the latrine holes were covered and that the latrines are clean. If they are not clean, the group could report to a teacher or health worker and ask advice about how to clean the latrines.

Build a child-size latrine Older children can build a child-size latrine in the school compound as an example, measure the pit and make a mould for the plate. A teacher or other adult needs to supervise the children who do the construction themselves. Parents can help by providing the materials – sand, cement, wood, etc.

The children can be grouped according to the places from which they come. In class, they can develop plans for helping each other build child-size latrines at their homes. A progress chart in class can show each home with a small child. Put a tick when a latrine is built at that home, and another when the small child has learned to use it. This may be done for boys and girls separately.

HOME	DATE LATRINE COMPLETED	IN USE
L	17.8.83	✓
S	20.4.83	
RA	2.5.8	
A	7.83	
	6.83	
	10.4.83	

TWO CASE STUDIES

In a refugee camp in East Africa, the latrines were sited at the edge of the camp. Young children were frightened to go to these latrines, especially at night. So the camp community dug small, open air latrines, near the homes, but away from the water sources. These have a tight cover to prevent flies moving in and out of the pit. The small children under five years feel safer and more confident using these child-sized latrines.

Looking after school latrines in Uganda

Children in Jinja, Uganda organised a rota for looking after the school latrines. These are the things they did to keep the latrines clean:

- Smoking the latrine: lighting the end of a bunch of sticks including scented wood and throwing this down the hole. The wood smoke helps to scent the latrine and burns the paper at the bottom. The resulting ash helps to tackle smells, and bugs and flies.
- Sweeping the latrines with ash: spreading ash around the hole and the surrounding floor of the latrine itself, to improve the smell, soak up any residue wetness (urine), keep flies away and kill off some of the bugs.
- Sweeping around the latrines: as it is a place where lots of children go and some have bare feet, regular sweeping helps keep down the jiggers that bore into children's feet, as well as mosquitoes and flies.

The monitors had to organise soap, water, ash, sticks, paper, and a broom, and keep the tippy taps functioning well (see diagram on the next page on making a tippy tap). The paper and soap were paid for from the proceeds of selling vegetables such as tomatoes and cabbage from the school garden.

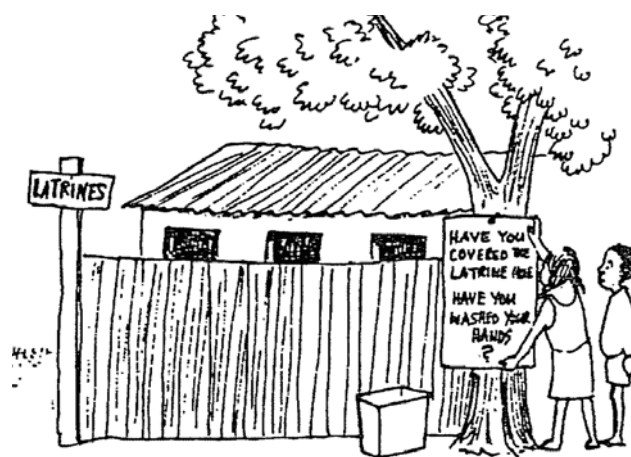
Children had communal 'latrine' flip flops (rubber sandals) which they used to go to and from the latrine. They also had tippy taps outside the latrines and planted flowers underneath the tippy taps. They would move the tippy taps when the area got a bit too wet but the monitors carried on watering the flowers. This meant that the latrines were also surrounded by flowers.

Follow-up

Ask the children questions:

- What causes diarrhoea?
- How can diarrhoea be prevented?
- Why is it important to be especially careful about younger children's faeces?
- What are some of the good hygiene habits which can help to stop the spread of germs?

Does the school now have a latrine, and a place to wash hands? What about at home? How many families have a special latrine or a special place for little children to defaecate? Have the children helped to make the special latrine? Have the children helped younger brothers or sisters to learn better hygiene? Ask them to describe what they did.



USING THIS SHEET

Teachers and health workers can emphasise the importance of keeping clean and using latrines, to prevent the spread of diarrhoea. Science lessons can be used for learning more about germs – what they are and how they spread sickness.

Teachers and parents can work with older children to plan and build the child-size latrine.

Children at school, and through **Scout, Guide**, and **religious groups** can spread the ideas of good hygiene – good food, clean water, and keeping clean – especially by their own good example. They can teach younger ones how to use a latrine and how to keep themselves clean, and help to build suitable child-size latrines where they are needed.

How to make a tippy tap

