



INTERNET ARTICLE

Clean Hands, Bright Future: Celebrating Global Handwashing Day in the North West

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October 15th marks Global Handwashing Day, a worldwide initiative aimed at promoting hand hygiene and reducing the spread of infectious diseases. With the theme **“Why are clean hands still important?”** the Department of Water and Sanitation, in collaboration with the Departments of Health and Education, joined forces to educate learners at different schools in the province about the importance of handwashing.

In Bojanala District, the day was celebrated at Ennis Thabong Primary school in Hartbeespoort and Kgalagatsene Primary School in Koster. In Dr Ruth District Municipality the day was celebrated at Rekopane ELC and Modisakoma Primary School at Dithakwaneng village, and Goitseone Mankurwane Primary School in Taung,

Global Handwashing Day was first introduced in 2008 by the Global Handwashing Partnership, a coalition of organizations seeking to improve handwashing habits worldwide. The day aims to raise awareness about handwashing with soap's impact on public health, encourage governments, institutions, and individuals to prioritize hand hygiene, and promote behavioural change and habit formation.

Despite progress made in improving access to sanitation and hygiene facilities, South Africa still faces significant challenges in promoting handwashing practices. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), handwashing with soap is one of the most effective ways to prevent diarrheal diseases, which remain a leading cause of morbidity and mortality in the country.

At Ennis Thabong Primary and Kgalagatsene Primary School, officials from the Department of Water and Sanitation and the Department of Health led interactive sessions with pupils. Mr. Tieho Ntja, representing the Department of Water and Sanitation, took centre stage to emphasize the significance of handwashing. He shared seven essential handwashing tips with the pupils, that go as follows:

1. Wet hands with running water.
2. Apply enough soap to cover hands.
3. Rub palms together to create lather.
4. Scrub all surfaces including wrists.
5. Between fingers, and under nails.
6. Rub hands together for 20 seconds.
7. Rinse thoroughly with running water and shake hands dry or dry with a paper towel.

Mr. Ntja stressed that handwashing should become a habit, especially before eating, after using the toilet, after blowing nose, coughing, or sneezing, after touching animals or their waste, and

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after handling garbage. He highlighted that handwashing should take at least 20 seconds to effectively remove germs and bacteria.

In addition to handwashing, Mr. Sammy Ramotsho from the Department of Health educated the pupils on the importance of washing fruits and vegetables before consumption. He said failure to do so can lead to illnesses such as cholera, dysentery, typhoid fever, and food poisoning. Mr. Ramotsho demonstrated proper washing techniques and encouraged pupils to make it a habit.

In Dr Ruth district the focus was mostly on the little ones who are starting school, the early learning centers and the foundation phase in primary schools. Ms Lerato Mooki highlighted on all the handwashing techniques and emphasised the importance of washing hands anytime. She told them that “you touch, you wash”, therefore teaching them hands need to be washed anytime.

The event showcased the power of collaboration between government departments, schools, and communities. Partnerships like these are crucial in promoting sustainable behavioural change and improving public health.

Global Handwashing Day serves as a reminder of the simple yet powerful act of handwashing in preventing the spread of diseases. By educating the next generation about proper hand hygiene and the importance of washing fruits and vegetables, we empower them to create healthier communities.

As we commemorate Global Handwashing Day, let us reaffirm our commitment to prioritizing hand hygiene and promoting a culture of cleanliness in South Africa. Join the movement by making handwashing a habit, educating others about proper hand hygiene, supporting initiatives promoting handwashing and sanitation, and advocating for improved access to clean water and sanitation facilities.

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