

Hygiene means the things people do to stay clean and prevent the spread of germs – the tiny living things that cause disease. For every family in Africa, the most important hygiene message is 'WASH YOUR HANDS'. Great emphasis is placed on supplying adequate quantities of good drinking water in the prevention of diarrhoea. However, research suggests that persuading people to wash their hands after defecation and before preparing or eating food may be equally if not more important.

## Washing your hands with soap and water helps prevent the spread of disease!

### Why is using soap so important?

Water alone is not enough. Soap, or at least a soap substitute, is needed if hand washing is to prevent diarrhoea. Hand washing with soap will also reduce coughs, colds and other diseases like pneumonia. Germs that give people colds, coughs and pneumonia can be spread by droplets in the air but research shows that the spread by unwashed hands is no less important. Another cause for the severity of these respiratory infections is the smoke from cooking fires; as far as possible we need to protect children from this (See Action Sheet 57: Reducing kitchen smoke).

Soap works by sticking to the bits of dirt, bacteria and oil on your hands, making sure that the water you use washes them off. There is no easy substitute for soap. Ash or mud with water is better than water alone, possibly because we have to rub our hands to get them off. Soap is best, though. Any soap will do – that used for washing clothes is excellent! See Action Sheet 28: Making Soap.

How can we help people to wash their hands?

There are many factors that can help people to wash their hands, such as making sure they have enough soap and a good water supply to a tap near their houses (See the other Action Sheets in this section). In this sheet, emphasis is placed on how to make hand-washing easier where there is little water to spare because it has to be carried, usually by women who have many other responsibilities.

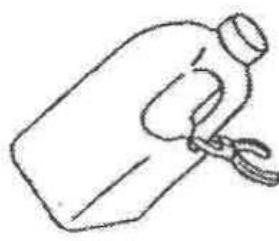
### Three ways to wash your hands

Hands can be washed successfully with relatively small quantities of water. Three methods that have been widely and successfully used are shown here.

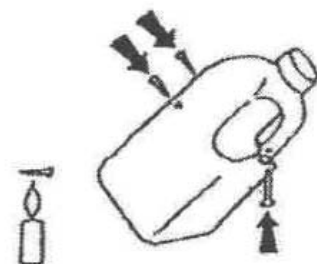
#### 1. Tippy-tap



Warm the lower part of the handle of a plastic container until it is shiny and soft.

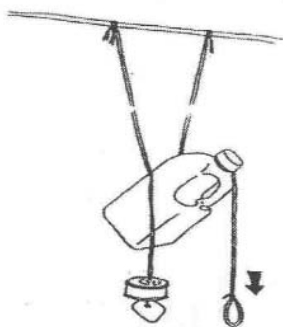


Quickly pinch this with pliers so that water can no longer pass through it.



Now using a sharp point or heated nail, make three holes as shown.

Thread string through the holes and attach to a stick. Thread another piece of string through the bottom of an upturned can and through the soap. The tin slips over the soap and protects it. Attach a further piece of string to pull and fill the handle of the tippy-tap with water



Fill your tippy-tap to just below the two holes and replace the top. Fix the stick in the kitchen or Preferably out side in the sun. Sunlight is wonderful at keeping water and containers clean as long as it is not left to become green.

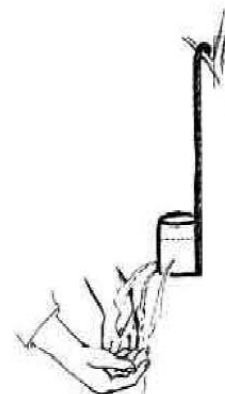


## 2. Leaking ladle dipper

The leaking ladle is kept in the jerry can or plastic container with a hole cut in the top.

The leaking ladle is made from a tin or plastic container with a couple of holes in it.

Remove the ladle with one finger and hook on a branch or piece of string when washing your hands.



## 3. Calabash Hand Washer

Arrange the calabash as shown with a hole. Note that the wooden plug has a groove cut in it. Pull the plug till water flows. Push in when finished.



## Tips on Hand washing.

It is important to supervise children and ensure that they use soap. Making soap available in a community and encouraging washing of hands can do as much as any medicine to improve their health.

## Acknowledgements

This Action Sheet is based on a factsheet by Professor David Morley, Founder and President of TALC, (Teaching-aids At Low Cost), now [www.healthbooksinternational.org](http://www.healthbooksinternational.org)

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