

Why clean water keeps us healthy

BY BEATRICE NAKIBUUKA

Water is life. Every day, children use water to drink, cook, bathe, wash hands and clean their homes. But not all water is safe for drinking. Some water looks clean but can still carry tiny germs that make children sick. Knowing where safe water comes from and how to treat water at home helps protect our bodies from dangerous diseases.

Where does safe water come from?

Safe drinking water usually comes from protected sources. These include piped water from taps, protected springs, boreholes and wells that are properly covered. Water from these sources is less likely to contain germs that cause illness. In many Ugandan communities, children also see water from rivers, lakes, ponds, swamps and open wells. This water is often used for washing or watering animals, but it is not always safe for drinking. Animals may drink from it, people may wash clothes nearby, and dirty water can flow into it when it rains. Even if such water looks clear, it may still carry germs.

Dirty water can contain germs that cause diarrhoea, typhoid and cholera. These diseases make both children and adults weak, cause stomach pain and frequent running to the latrine, and can even cause death if not treated early. When children drink unsafe water, the germs enter the body and start causing illness.

How to make drinking water safe

Boiling water is one of the easiest and safest ways to kill germs. When water is boiled until it bubbles strongly, the heat kills the germs that cause disease. After boiling, the water should be allowed to cool in a clean, covered container. Children should remember that boiled water must be stored safely. If clean water is poured into dirty cups or left uncovered, it can become unsafe again. Using clean cups and keeping containers covered protects the water.

Sometimes water treatment tablets such as water guard can be used to clean drinking water. These are often given out at health centres or during community health programmes. When used correctly, they kill germs and make water safe for drinking. It is important to follow instructions when treating water with tablets. Using too little may not kill all the germs, while using too much can make the water taste bad. Adults should help children understand how treated water should be handled and stored.

Keeping drinking water safe

Safe water does not end with boiling or treating. Clean water should be kept in clean jerrycans, pots or bottles with covers. Hands should be washed before touching drinking water. Cups should not be shared when someone is sick. Children can also help by keeping water sources clean. They should not throw rubbish, wash clothes or bathe animals near water sources.

Send your health questions to: