



# WHY GOOD HOME HYGIENE WILL KEEP THE DOCTOR AWAY

By Agnes Kyotalengerire

Ruth Akot, 40, emerges from a semi-permanent latrine. She looks around for a facility to wash her hands in vain. It is then that her host instructs the house help to bring Akot water to wash her hands. The girl brings water in a cup for Akot to wash her hands.

"I asked for soap, but the girl refused to bring it, saying it was reserved for washing utensils, clothes and for bathing," Akot narrates her frustration.

Like it was with Akot's host, the issue of households lacking handwashing facilities is common.

The Uganda Water and Environment Sector Performance Report 2016 estimates that only 39% of the urban population have access to toilets with handwashing facilities, although some facilities lack soap or/and water. This means that 61% of the population have toilets without handwashing facilities, yet washing hands regularly with soap and water is one effective way of preventing disease.

"If you do not wash hands after using the toilet, you carry faeces in your palms, which puts one at risk of infection," Emmerly Mbaha,

the president of the Environmental Health Workers Association of Uganda, explains.

According to the Ministry of Water and Environment's sector performance report 2016, only 36% of Ugandans wash their hands after visiting the toilet, yet handwashing is a 'do-it-yourself vaccine' against the spread of diarrhoeal and respiratory diseases. Data from the Ministry of Health shows that over 75% of the disease burden in Uganda is preventable (MOH, 2016).

Handwashing can save one a lot of money that could have been spent on hospital visits and treatment of diseases.

According to Mbaha, the handwashing facility should be placed near the latrine/toilet. In urban areas, one can use a sink



Soap is essential in home and personal hygiene

with tap water and soap. In rural areas, one can improvise by putting water in cans and place the soap besides it. In addition, a handwashing facility can be placed near the kitchen, where people can wash their hands before eating.

## Open defecation

Without a latrine, people defecate in bushes and water bodies. This practice puts these people, especially children, at risk of faecal-oral diseases like diarrhoea, cholera and typhoid. Diarrhoea is a condition of having at least three loose motions or liquid bowel movements a day, leading to loss of fluids and nutrients in one's body.

Diarrhoeal diseases are the second-leading causes of death among children under five years, according to the World Health Organisation (WHO). Globally, there are nearly 1.7 billion cases of diarrhoeal diseases every year and about 760,000 children under the age of five succumb to them.

In addition to water and soap, the other mandatory requirement for a latrine/toilet is anal cleaning materials such as toilet paper, waste paper or soft leaves. In the absence of such cleaning materials, some people

use their hands and smear the faeces on the walls.

## How to take care of latrines

According to Mbaha, the recommended distance between the latrine and main house should be approximately 10 metres. The latrine should be 15 feet deep to prevent the spread of germs. For instance, if someone with hook worms defecated in a full latrine, the worms cannot easily crawl to the surface and infect other users.

The latrine should be fly-proof. Flies can best be kept away by pouring ash into the latrine, which masks the smell that attracts the flies.

The latrines can be smoked using dry banana leaves at least twice a week to keep them smelling fresh. This can be done by tying banana leaves in a bundle and placing a burning piece of charcoal in the middle. This ensures that the leaves to burn slowly and continuously emit smoke. The smouldering bundle is tied on a long stick and lowered into the pit.

Mbaha says when a latrine fills up until three feet below the surface, it should be covered as it is considered full.

If a family has a toilet, Mbaha says running water is a requirement to

regularly flush the waste down the drainage system.

"A dirty toilet can be a source of infection. Therefore, the toilet should be cleaned twice a day or whenever it gets dirty with water and disinfectants to keep germs at bay," he advises.

To thoroughly clean the toilet, pour a disinfectant or detergents in the bowl. Then use a toilet brush to scrub around and then flush.

Maintaining sanitation in one's home goes beyond having a latrine or toilet. Other must-have facilities include bathroom, kitchen, drying rack and proper ventilation.

## Bathroom

The bathroom is where most people start and finish their day. Upon waking up, one visits the toilet, washes hands, takes a bath and brushes the teeth. The same usually happens before going to bed. It is estimated that on average, a person spends about 18 months of their lifetime in the bathroom. It is against this background that Christine Akurut, a public health nurse, advises to keep the bathroom clean.

Akurut says stray hair, toothpaste in the

Continued on page 28

# Good hygiene cuts health bills

From page 27

sink and a wet floor are unhygienic and are breeding grounds for bacteria. She thus advises people to regularly clean the bathroom with soap, water and disinfectants whenever they get dirty - at least three times in a day.

### Spacious rooms

One's house should have spacious rooms and not be overcrowded. The doors, windows and ventilators should be wide enough to allow good aeration.

### Clean kitchen

A dirty kitchen breeds germs. It also harbours insects, for example, cockroaches and flies, which transmit diarrhoeal diseases such as typhoid and dysentery.

Frederick Byenume, the Hoima district health officer, says the best defence against illness is cleaning the

kitchen thoroughly every day. The cleaning should focus on the kitchen sink, where utensils are washed, drawers and shelves.

"It does not make sense to keep a clean cup in a dirty shelf," Byenume warns. She also advises that all empty containers be thrown away as they provide a hiding place for cockroaches and rats, which feed on leftover food in the kitchen. So it is important to keep the kitchen free of leftovers by throwing them away and washing the utensils after meals. Additionally, the kitchen should



Having a plate stand is good for the hygiene of a home

have means of smoke escape, for example, a chimney or wide windows to allow smoke. Continuous exposure to smoke and ash takes a toll on the user's health. Mbaha explains that when smoke goes into a person's eyes, it causes irritation and itching. As one continues to rub the eyes, the lens gets damaged, causing poor vision. Continuous exposure to smoke also puts one at risk of lung infection.

### Dish drying rack

A dish drying rack should be constructed five metres from the kitchen. According to Byenume, it should be placed in-between the house and the kitchen to allow easy access to utensils.

Placing the utensils on a drying rack ensures they dry in the sun, which kills germs that may not be eliminated by water and soap, he explains.

Using a drying rack also prevents germs and worms from getting onto the dishes, which can be the case if they are placed on the ground.

However, Byenume laments that in modern times, especially in urban areas, the practice of constructing and using drying racks is dying out. People now prefer to dry the utensils on dish racks besides the kitchen sinks.

Nevertheless, he says even with indoor kitchens, the sink should be constructed near the window where sunlight trickles in to dry the utensils.

### Animal/bird house

James Denis Ongom, a health inspector working in Padyer in Nebbi district, says an animal house is a must-have to prevent humans from contracting zoonotic diseases such as tuberculosis and dangerous insects such as fleas and ticks.

Zoonotic diseases are spread between animals and people. They can be caused by viruses, bacteria, parasites, and fungi. Unfortunately, people in rural areas sleep with animals and birds in the house.

Ongom recommends building animal houses about 100 metres from the main house. The bird house can be constructed in the backyard and should be cleaned daily.

## Hygiene practices that will keep disease at bay

**C**lear bushes, stagnant waters, use treated mosquito nets

You do not have to wait for your landlord or health officer to clear the bushes and drain stagnant water around your home that are a breeding ground for mosquitos which spread malaria.

The national malaria prevalence stands at 19%, down from 42% (2009), according to the Malaria Indicator Survey (MIS) 2014.

The same report indicates that malaria remains the leading cause of death among infants and children under the age of five. In 2015/16, the disease was responsible for 43% of hospitalised under-five deaths.

Dr. Lugemwa, a malaria specialist, encourages sleeping under treated mosquito nets as a preventive measure.

Get rid of clutter: wardrobe, dirty dishes, a heap of empty tins invites critters such as cockroaches into your house, which spread diseases.

Some people have an attachment to broken furniture and clothes, which attract vermin. In Nebbi, a health

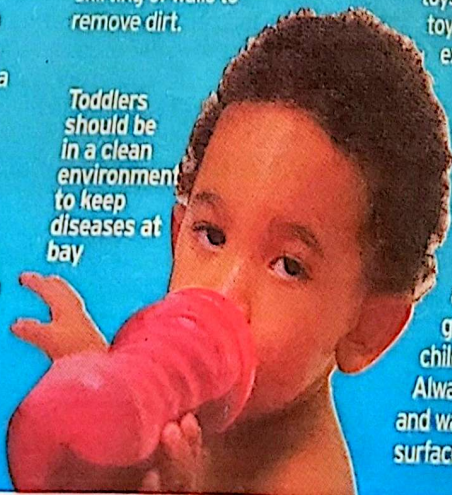
inspector in Iganga district, advises people to get rid of such items for aeration of the house.

Researchers at the Centre of Everyday Lives and Families state that there is a link between high stress hormones in women who live in cluttered home. The research proves that the more clutter a woman has, the more stressed she is, because she associates a messy home with failure.

### Dust and mop regularly

Dusting the house, particularly curtains, carpets and chairs, prevents infections like flu. While mopping, focus on the corners and skirting of walls to remove dirt.

Toddlers should be in a clean environment to keep diseases at bay



### Boil drinking water

According to Kate Nimanya, the country director of Water for Peoples, a non-government organisation, boiling or purifying drinking water prevents diseases such as typhoid and cholera.

"Most of these disease-causing germs come from faecal matter. Boiling water destroys the germs, although using the latest water purification technologies, for example, solar disinfectants and sun filters are more effective," she says.

### Tip for homes with infants

People ignore to wash children's toys yet infants often put the toys in their mouth as they play exposing them to infections.

Keep door knobs, switches and TV remotes clean. While cleaning, people often forget the most frequently touched surfaces, for example, door knobs, remotes and light switches, yet these surfaces are usually brimming with germs and are things that children like playing with.

Always use disinfectants, soap and water to thoroughly wipe the surfaces and the objects clean.