

### BEHAVIOUR 1: WASH HANDS WITH SOAP AND WATER

---

#### Behaviour to promote

---

**Everyone should wash their hands with soap and water after defecation or after cleaning a child who has defecated, before eating and before handing food. Wash small children’s hands with water and soap before they eat and after defecation.**

#### Context

---

UNICEF estimates that if people wash their hands with soap, infant morbidity related to diarrheal diseases could be reduced by almost 50%. According to the DRC DHS 2013-14, among households in which hand washing was observed, 50% of households had neither water nor soap nor any other cleaning product to wash hands. This was more commonly the case in rural areas (62%) than urban areas (37%) and among the poorest wealth quintile (64%) compared with the richest quintile (31%).

#### Barriers to behavior change

---

If hand washing with plain water is a common practice, the use of soap is not a widespread practice. Washing hands with soap is not yet an established habit. People believe soap is not necessary and that water alone is enough, or some are aware but do not use soap just due to negligence.

The majority of households, including among the poorest, have soap at home. The problem is that soap is rarely used for handwashing. Laundry and washing dishes are seen as priorities for the use of soap. Ash is a suitable alternative that can be used in the absence of clean water and soap.

Many Congolese, particularly in rural areas, believe that “black men don’t die from microbes”.

The lack of latrines and hygienic practices in schools (only 25% of schools have latrines in DRC) does not encourage the promotion of hand washing among students.

The invisibility of microbes is a barrier to hand washing (if it is not seen it must be clean).

#### Contributing factors to behavior change

---

Most women say that washing hands is important to remove dirt and they associate this with preventing disease. They justify hand washing as a means of keeping clean, though not specifically to kill germs.

In what situations do people wash your hands? Most common: Before and after meals, but often with just water. Less common: before preparing or serving food; when one considers that hands are dirty; after using latrines; after touching a dirty object; after cleaning a child.

Most households have access to water and sometimes soap, but it may not be prioritised for hand-washing.

Some regional advocacy and awareness campaigns have been held in recent years, through initiatives such as UNICEF’s “clean villages”.