

“think about water”

girls worldwide say
“world thinking day”
2008

Water facts and figures

As part of our continuing focus on adolescent girls' health, we have chosen the theme of water and health as our World Thinking Day theme for 2008.

Why water?

Clean water is essential for life. We need clean water to drink, to stay healthy. It is also necessary to have a sufficient supply of water that is easily accessible to meet our daily hygienic and personal needs. But over a billion people in the world do not have it. This fact and the lack of sanitation result in over two million people dying from water-related diseases every year. In the developing world, 5,000 children die every day from diarrhoea caused by unsafe water and poor sanitation.

Girls and young women need clean water to survive – to be physically and mentally fit and healthy.

What can you do?

We have developed a number of resources to help you to explore the issue of water and health, and to help you fundraise for World Thinking Day.

Why not download some of our activity cards to use with your unit or troop – giving you ideas ranging from holding a bread and water lunch to keeping a water diary for a week.

Download some of the facts and figures about water and then test your troop about what they know.

Water facts

Water covers 75 per cent of the Earth's surface – 97.5 per cent of that is salt water, only 2.5 per cent is freshwater¹.

Icecaps and glaciers hold 74 per cent of the world's freshwater. Almost all the rest is deep underground, or locked in soils as moisture or permafrost. Only 0.3 per cent of the world's freshwater is found in rivers or lakes².

Less than one per cent of the world's surface or below-ground freshwater is accessible for human use³.

1 UNEP, 2003

2 UNEP, 2003

3 UNEP, 2003

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Provide access to clean water

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We want to focus on the consequences, particularly for girls' health, of the lack of access to clean water and sanitation. We will also highlight some of the environmental factors affecting water supplies.

Facts about clean water

- More than 1.1 billion people worldwide lack an adequate and safe supply of water for their daily needs⁴.
- The lack of clean water close to people's homes affects people's time, livelihoods and quality of life.
- Many women and children in developing countries spend hours each day walking miles to collect water. This water is usually dirty and unsafe but they have no alternative.
- Collecting water is extremely time consuming. One of the most serious effects is that children, particularly girls, often do not have the time to attend school.
- Girls are also prevented from going to school because of lack of adequate sanitation facilities, especially when they are menstruating⁵.
- Four out of ten people in the world, 2.4 billion, do not have somewhere safe and clean to go to the toilet. And yet, according to the World Health Organization, the safe disposal of children's faeces leads to a reduction of nearly 40 per cent in childhood diarrhoea⁶.
- Diarrhoea is the second biggest killer of children under five worldwide (after pneumonia) but in most cases it can be prevented through safe water, sanitation and hygiene education⁷.
- Access to water and sanitation are crucial for poverty reduction, as they impact on so many areas of people's lives in the developing world including health, education and nutrition. For example, poor people, especially women, are often unable to engage in paid work when they do not have safe water nearby. This is because they often spend hours each day walking to the nearest water source. The World Health Organization estimates that 5.6 billion working days would be gained each year if there was universal access to safe water and sanitation⁸.
- According to the World Wildlife Fund, there are an estimated 12,000 cubic kilometres of polluted water worldwide, which is more than the total amount contained in the world's ten largest river basins at any given moment⁹.
- Water is becoming scarce due to higher pollution levels and habitat degradation. Contamination denies as many as 3.3 billion people access to clean water supplies. In developing countries, an estimated 90 per cent of wastewater is discharged directly into rivers and streams without treatment. Each year there are about 250 million cases of water-related diseases, with roughly five to ten million deaths¹⁰.

4 UN World Water Development Report, 2003

5 Wateraid, 2007

6 Wateraid, 2007

7 Wateraid, 2007

8 Wateraid, 2007

9 BBC website, 2007

10 UN World Water Development Report, 2003

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Drink water for health

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We want to highlight the importance of drinking safe and clean water, especially for girls' health.

Facts about safe water

- In the past 20 years, more than 2.4 billion people have gained access to safe water supplies and 600 million to improved sanitation. Nevertheless, one in six people still have no regular access to safe drinking water¹¹.
- The Institute of Medicine in the US advises that adult women consume 2.2 litres (about 9 cups) a day and adult men consume roughly 3.0 liters (about 13 cups) of total water a day. A person's water needs depend on many factors, including your health, how active you are and where you live¹².
- The average human body consists of more than 65 per cent of water, an essential element for all its organs to function properly. The body loses water each and this needs to be replaced to maintain its hydration.
- Dehydration leads to a deterioration of cognitive functions, such as short term memory.
- Brain tissue consists of 85 per cent of water; when it is dehydrated the level of energy production in the brain decreases, reducing a person's ability to concentrate

¹¹ UNEP, 2003

¹² <http://www.cnn.com/HEALTH/library/NU/00283.html>

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Conserve water for the world

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The health of women and girls is particularly affected by the lack of water resources, however, water scarcity is a global issue. We want to look at ways we can help to prevent it.

Facts about conserving water

- The average Sub-Saharan African uses 10-20 litres of water a day – compared to 600 litres used by urban dwellers in the US and Japan, and Europeans, who use about 300 litres. Running a tap uses 7-12 litres a minute, sprinklers and hoses use about 20 litres a minute, and flushing a toilet uses 6-20 litres¹³.
- Within 25 years, half the world’s population could have trouble finding enough freshwater for drinking and irrigation¹⁴.
- Water supplies are falling while the demand is dramatically growing at an unsustainable rate. Over the next 20 years, the average supply of water worldwide per person is expected to drop by a third and yet water consumption has almost doubled in the last 50 years¹⁵.
- By the middle of this century, seven billion people in 60 countries may be faced with water scarcity¹⁶.
- Water problems are more related to mismanagement than scarcity¹⁷.
- Up to 50 per cent of urban water and 60 per cent of water used in agriculture is wasted through leaks and evaporation¹⁸.
- Logging and land conversion to accommodate human demand has shrunk the world’s forests by half, contributing to increased soil erosion and water scarcity¹⁹.
- Currently, over 80 countries, representing 40 per cent of the world’s people, are subject to serious water shortages. Conditions may get worse in the next 50 years as populations grow and as global warming disrupts rainfall patterns²⁰.

13 UN World Water Development Report, 2003

14 UN World Water Development Report, 2003

15 UNEP, 2003

16 UNEP, 2003

17 UNEP, 2003

18 UNEP, 2003

19 UNEP, 2003

20 UNEP, 2003