

Urgent Hygiene Crisis: Combatting Diarrhea and Skin Infections in Gaza

A call for action for the Importation of Soap, Shampoo, and Detergent

In the Gaza Strip, where health care facilities are overstretched and living conditions are unsanitary, the lack of access to soap and basic hygiene items makes it difficult for families to protect themselves against communicable diseases. Promoting handwashing with soap is essential for enhancing public health and preventing disease outbreaks. The lack of hygiene items disproportionately affects children, pregnant women, and people with compromised immune systems. The scarcity of basic hygiene supplies, especially in crowded shelters, also contributes to increased stress and anxiety among families.

Handwashing with soap is one of the most effective ways to prevent the spread of WASH-related diseases, such as diarrhea, respiratory infections, and scabies and other skin infections. This simple practice can reduce diarrheal diseases by up to 40% and respiratory infections by about 20%. It can protect approximately one in three children who suffer from diarrhea and prevent the spread of germs to food, drinks, and surfaces.

Hygiene practices are also crucial for maintaining nutritional health by reducing the incidence of diarrhea, which can lead to malnutrition. Additionally, it helps prevent the spread of scabies by removing mites and their eggs from the skin.

The situation in the Gaza Strip is dire, with soap either unavailable in markets or sold at unreasonably high prices, averaging 38 NIS (10 USD) per 75g piece. Hygiene items are normally a cost-efficient means for disease prevention when compared to the costs of responding to an outbreak. The WASH cluster estimates that a family relying on cash for work income would spend 60% of the unskilled income on consumable hygiene items (35% for skilled workers).

Shampoo, detergent (including for laundry), and washing-up liquid are no longer available in the market. As a result, community kitchens cannot wash kitchen pots properly, cleaning shelters where thousands of people live is impossible, and families cannot wash their few remaining clothes, vegetables and cooking utensils and cannot shower. Even worse, health care facilities struggle to find the minimum cleaning materials to protect patients, staff, and carers from infections.

Urgent ask:

The WASH and Health clusters are calling for responding agencies and/or the private sector to supply critical hygiene items in the Gaza Strip:

- **550 tons of soap¹ per month: Approximately 5,000,000 bars of 110gr, i.e. 695 pallets per month, or 24 pallets per day.**
- **500,000 bottles of shampoo (700 ml) per month: 420 pallets, equivalent to 14 pallets per day.**
- **500,000 bottles of washing-up liquid (675 ml) per month: 410 pallets, equivalent to 14 pallets per day.**
- **500,000 bottles of laundry detergent or powder (1 kg) per month: 410 pallets, equivalent to 14 pallets per day.**
- **100,000 bottles of cleaning detergent (1 l) per month: 410 pallets, equivalent to 14 pallets per day.**

Call for action

Safe access to commercial goods: The WASH and Health Clusters calls for a minimum of 5 trucks per day of commercial vendors with critical hygiene items including soap and basic hygiene supplies to enter Gaza, both in the South and the North.

Donors to advocate for the inclusion of basic hygiene items as commercial goods rather than restricted to being humanitarian items.

Engagement of humanitarian community: The WASH and Health clusters urge the broader humanitarian community to fully adopt a no regrets policy on bringing in hygiene items and to conduct blanket distributions using all existing networks including as an accompaniment in food and shelter distributions.

WASH Cluster Partners: We urge WASH cluster partners to focus on community-level handwashing with soap and launch a large-scale handwashing campaign. We call on all humanitarian actors to plan, procure, and implement handwashing stations with soap at humanitarian service delivery points.

By ensuring access to these essential hygiene items, we can save lives and improve the health and well-being of families in Gaza and the region.

¹ Evidence from [Reid and Thorne](#) indicates soap with 5% monosulfiram is known to be 84-86% effective in treating scabies and preventing reinfection.