

5698 GPs in Telangana observe Global Handwashing Day



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As many as 5,698 Gram Panchayats (GPs) from 449 Mandals (Blocks) of Telangana engaged in various handwashing activities on 14th and 15th October as a part of Global Handwashing Day, observed worldwide on 15th October 2021.

The Global Handwashing Day programme saw active participation of children, students, Anganwadi workers, teachers, ASHA workers, GP Sarpanches, Panchayat Secretaries, ward members and many others from the village community across Telangana State. Of the 1,09,345 people that participated, 60,220 were children in the age group of 5-18 years.

Hand hygiene is extremely important in everyday life and neglecting it can be fatal. Scientists claim that dirty hands contain about 150 different types of germs and hence recommend that people frequently wash hands with soap for a minimum of 20 seconds.

Reports indicate that rural people suffer from diseases such as diarrhoea owing to a lack of awareness about hand hygiene. In India, about 13-14 per cent of the country's annual deaths among children under the age of five are attributable to diarrheal diseases. One-third of children in the country can be saved from diarrhoea and respiratory diseases if proper infrastructure is provided in schools.

Moreover, several studies suggest that hand washing can reduce diarrheal diseases by 30 per cent and acute respiratory infections by 20 per cent. Indeed, handwashing plays an important role in reducing the transmission of outbreak-related pathogens such as shigellosis, SARS, and hepatitis-E. It is to draw attention to such critical issues, UNICEF celebrates World Handwashing Day on October 15th each year, this year's theme being 'Our future is at Hand-Let's Move Forward Together.'

A recent study by Water-Aid has revealed that during the COVID-19 pandemic, merely 61 per cent of people washed their hands with soap after returning home from outside; and 34 per cent washed their hands after sneezing or coughing.

Experts have also been reiterating that washing hands with soap can control the Covid-19 infection by up to 36 per cent. Also, washing hands with soap before meals and after defecation can help prevent many diseases such as diarrhoea, pneumonia, influenza, and Ebola.

Lack of understanding of the importance of handwashing impedes the development of low-and middle-income countries. According to the 76th National Sample Survey Organization report, 36 per cent of Indians practice handwashing before meals, of which 25 per cent were from the rural areas and 56 per cent in the urban areas. Further, only 74 per cent of Indians practice handwashing after defecation, of which 67 per cent are from the rural areas and 88 per cent from the urban areas.

As per the National Annual Rural Sanitation Survey 2018-19, 40 per cent of schools and 42 per cent of Anganwadi Centres in the country have access to handwashing with soap and water.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the WHO released new recommendations and guidelines stipulating that hygiene facilities should be established at the entrance to all public and private commercial buildings, major transport hubs, markets, shops, places of worship, health care facilities, and schools.

In this regard, the State Governments have been called upon to take special initiatives, and conduct awareness programmes for people in rural areas. It is imperative to take steps to ensure that there was adequate supply of drinking water in homes.

Coordination between departments such as Women and Child Welfare, Human Resources, Panchayat Raj and Rural Development is vital to inculcate the practice of handwashing among the village folk. Besides, meetings with youth, women's associations, education committees, voluntary organizations, and donors in the villages need to be convened to explain the importance of handwashing to all.

Special emphasis needs to be given to children, adolescent girls, and lactating mothers and their awareness on the importance of handwashing. While women should be made fully aware of hand hygiene during menstruation, it is equally important to conduct knowledge programmes to improve hand hygiene among students.

It is being advocated among schools to organize special hygiene and sanitation programmes once a week, involving village-level employees. Short films, videos, and messages on the importance of hand hygiene are to be made available to the public through social media.

The campaign needs to be carried out extensively through use of public address systems in the villages. Also, the local leadership in the Gram Panchayat needs to conduct awareness programmes on hand hygiene at least once a month with active participation. Hand hygiene has to be made a part of everyone's lifestyle as it can prevent most infectious diseases.



