



## DepEd, DOH and UNICEF unite to bring Clean Hands for All this October 15

**Manila, 15 October 2020** — As the COVID-19 pandemic continues, the world turns to a simple age-old solution to reduce the risk of disease transmission – handwashing with soap and water.

On October 15, 2020, this year's celebration of Global Handwashing Day will be its most significant yet. For the first time, two of the most crucial government agencies in shaping the future and well-being of a generation are coming together to mark the beginning of a stronger partnership.

"DepEd has been celebrating Global Handwashing Day in schools since 2008, in recognition of the importance of building the habit of handwashing among children to ensure their health. Through our WASH in Schools Program, DepEd has institutionalized actions to improve handwashing facilities and instill handwashing behavior among learners. And now under the new normal, our Basic Education-Learning Continuity Plan also integrates handwashing practice as part of the required health standards. With the children continuing their learning at home because of the pandemic, we call on families to make their homes a safe environment to live and learn; and teach their children to make handwashing a habit. And when we do return to school, handwashing will be key in ensuring safety of our children," says DepEd Secretary Leonor Briones.

With the theme "Clean Hands For All", the Department of Education (DepEd) and the Department of Health (DOH), with support from UNICEF, unite various development partners, sector representatives and local chief executives in an online symposium on October 15 and 16, 2020. The event aims to identify key directions for sustaining the handwashing habit beyond the COVID-19 pandemic and promote sustainable proper hand hygiene culture in the Philippines.

"The DOH Bida Solusyon sa COVID-19 campaign aims to reinforce and enable four key preventive behaviors. One of these is hand hygiene or cleaning of hands through handwashing with soap and water or sanitizing with alcohol-based hand rub. Together with DepEd, we are calling on everyone to do their share to beat the COVID-19 virus today and ensure better health outcomes beyond the pandemic. To achieve our objectives, we need all sectors to renew our efforts and commitment – local officials and authorities, local health workers, teachers, parents and community members. To save lives and reduce illness, it is vital that we combine our expertise in health, education, communication and community knowledge to raise awareness and promote hygienic and safe practices," says DOH Secretary Francisco Duque III.

DOH has been promoting handwashing practice as an integrated part of their health programs and particularly through the Zero Open Defecation Program (ZODP) that utilizes approaches and strategies under the umbrella concept of total sanitation to curb open defecation practices and promoting frequent and proper hand washing among others.

Handwashing with soap is key in the fight against COVID-19. It destroys the outer membrane of the virus and thereby inactivates it. One study found that regular handwashing with soap can reduce the likelihood of common coronavirus infection by 36%<sup>i</sup>. However, based on 2019 data, over 7 million Filipinos<sup>ii</sup> are unable to wash their hands due to lack of access to a handwashing facility, water, and/or soap. This is found to be highest among poorest households and those living in rural areas. From school year 2018-2019 data, only half of schools have at least one group handwashing facility with soap<sup>iii</sup>.

“Handwashing is critical to children’s health and development. Yet, handwashing is still out of reach for so many children and families—especially the most vulnerable. Sustained investments are needed to make hand hygiene a practice beyond the pandemic. The partnership of DepEd and DOH in bringing together a national handwashing roadmap is a critical step towards a safer future for children in the Philippines,” says UNICEF Philippines Representative Oyunsaikhan Dendevnorov.

The lack of access to hand hygiene facilities is not just in homes and schools but can also be found in workplaces, healthcare facilities, and public spaces as well. Even when awareness and knowledge around handwashing is high – actual practice is often found to be much lower. In a study in 2018 by the Department of Education and UNICEF among school children, observations demonstrated that less than 8% did actually wash their hands after using the toilet even when a handwashing facility with soap and water was available. The issue is a detriment to public health and safety and requires structural change from the whole of society and the government, acting together.

The *Clean Hands for All: Learning and Partnership Symposium* will be streaming for free on October 15 and October 16, 2020, from 9:30AM to 12NN. Held entirely online, various organizations will be sharing new and innovative ideas that can spark behavioral change as well as sustain handwashing practice in various sectors and settings. This activity is part of the support of UNICEF to the Philippine Government in developing a National Handwashing Campaign that will be rolled out in 2021.

Full details on GHD 2020 celebration and activities can be found at WASH Philippines FB page @washphcoordination.

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<sup>i</sup> Hand Hygiene Practices and the Risk of Human Coronavirus Infections in a UK Community Cohort, Last accessed from <https://wellcomeopenresearch.org/articles/5-98>

<sup>ii</sup> Philippine Statistics Authority (2019). Last accessed from <https://psa.gov.ph/sites/default/files/attachments/ird/pressrelease/Attachment%20-%20Tabele%201b.pdf>

<sup>iii</sup> Department of Education (2019). WASH in Schools Monitoring Report for SY 2018-2019. Last accessed from <https://wins.deped.gov.ph/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/TSA-WinS-Monitoring-Booklet-Web-20191028-NEWEST.pdf>