

Splashing start to first handwashing day

LONDON: Millions of children around the world yesterday marked the United Nations' first Global Handwashing Day with the simple act of washing hands.

More than 120 million children in 70 countries across five continents are expected to participate in the campaign and pledge to embrace more hygienic practices by the simple act of washing their hands.

The UN says it wants to send out the message that this simple routine is one of the most effective ways of preventing killer diseases.

An estimated 5,000 children die daily from diarrhoea, but half of those deaths could be prevented if they washed their hands with soap before meals and after going to the toilet, Unicef spokesman Veronique Taveau told AFP.

The UN says washing hands with water alone is not enough "because you fail to wash off the germs". "We are recommending hand-washing with soap," said Unicef's senior sanitation and hygiene programme adviser Therese Dooley.

Nearly half of the world's population do not have access to adequate sanitation. The UN is celebrating 2008 as the International Year of Sanitation.



Indian children observing Global Handwashing Day yesterday by washing their hands at a roadside tap in Kolkata. PHOTO: ASSOCIATED PRESS