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NOTE: This is an interim guidance document, representing sound public health practice and information as it is currently available. It will be updated any time any new guidance is released on this topic.

HANDWASHING GUIDANCE IN AREAS WITH FEW WATER RESOURCES

How these guidelines reflect faithful Christian practice:

Water is a precious gift of God, reflecting God's good creation. In the creation story in the book of Genesis (Genesis 1), on the third day God creates the oceans, the dry land, and the vegetation that provides us with the food we need. The story reflects the balance between land resources, water resources, and food resources as a reflection of God's intention for a good creation. We show our thanks for the good gift of water by using it responsibly; in this time of the coronavirus outbreak, water brings life not only through drinking but also at providing a way for soap to be used effectively to kill the virus and keep us healthy.

Handwashing with soap and water is a very effective way to kill the COVID-19 virus. To kill the virus, do the following:

1. Put a small amount of soap into your hand and then add a small amount of water.
2. Rub your hands together briskly to generate lather and suds.
3. Cover all surfaces of your hands with the lather. Be sure to wash between your fingers and on the back side of the hand.
4. Keep washing with the soapy lather for about 40 seconds.
5. Rinse off the lather with a small amount of water.

Washing with soap is so effective because

- Soap suds break apart the outer shell of the virus. Once this happens, the virus is not dangerous.
- Soap is less expensive than hand sanitizers and for most people it does not cause skin irritation.
- Any kind of soap is effective. Bar soap, laundry detergent, liquid soap, or dishwashing liquid all work to kill the virus as long as enough soap to create a lather is used.

Could ash be substituted for soap

- The benefits of handwashing with ash are not known in relation to the coronavirus. In many communities where soap is scarce, ash has been recommended as a substitute for general hand hygiene practices. Ash works by generating friction on the hands to remove germs whereas soap actually deactivates bacteria and viruses. Ash may be more effective at limiting the spread of the virus than using water alone but handwashing with soap and water is preferable.

Should chlorinated water be used to wash hands?

- During the Ebola outbreak in 2014-2015, chlorinated water was recommended for handwashing. The Coronavirus is deactivated quickly by soap so chlorinated water is not needed.

Could soapy water be pre-mixed and then placed in containers for individuals or households to use?

- Yes. This is one way family members could keep their hands clean when away from home. The soapy water must have enough soap in it so that when it is placed on the hands and the hands are rubbed together, the mixture generates soap suds and lather.

What can our community do to maximize our water if we're in the midst of the dry season or drought?

- In communities with scarce water supplies, water obviously gets prioritized for other purposes such as drinking. This is understandable.

Nonetheless, handwashing with soap and water is the most important thing people can do to limit the spread of the coronavirus. If water is scarce, use very little by wetting hands with only a little bit of water. Rub hands together to produce a good lather and wash for 40 seconds. Then rinse with a bit more water to remove the soap.

As long as soap is used correctly, individuals can effectively clean their hands by re-using water that has been used for laundry, bathing, or washing dishes (this water is often called gray water). Use enough soap to form a lather with the gray water; this will effectively kill any germs on the hands (including the coronavirus) so that the person can prevent the spread of the virus and safely eat after handwashing with gray water.

What should we know about hand drying?

Hand drying is also important! Wet hands pick up viruses or other harmful germs from a surface more easily than dry hands. So do the following:

1. Dry your hands thoroughly.
2. If there are no materials for hand drying close by, shake your hands to get some of the water off and then allow them to completely dry.
3. Don't use your hands to pick up anything while wet.
4. Some people may not have time to allow the hands to air dry. Maybe they have to quickly return to work or run to catch a bus. If so, they should dry their hands on their clothes rather than touch surfaces with wet hands.

What role can local faith communities play in water management?

Local congregations and masjid can be important sites for handwashing stations. Here are some suggestions for creating handwashing stations.

1. Use water dispensers that are sturdy, lightweight, and portable. An example would be large plastic dispensers.
2. If possible, use a dispenser with a lever that can be operated without the use of the hands instead of knob that must be opened and closed by the hand. One option for a no touch dispenser called a tippy tap can be made by members of the community from inexpensive materials. Instructions for making a tippy tap can be found at:
<http://www.tippytap.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/03/How-to-build-a-tippy-tap-manual.pdf>
3. If a faith community sets up a handwashing station, members of that community should assure that it has a constant water supply and sufficient supply of soap.
4. Some local faith communities may opt to distribute soapy water dispensers to households in the community.
5. Finally, local communities may opt to create and operate a no touch dispenser (often called a tippy tap).

Information gathered from

The Centre for Affordable Water and Sanitation Technology (www.cawst.org)
www.tippytap.org