



## Hand washing in the Americas

The simple habit of washing hands with soap and water at critical times—especially before eating or preparing food and after using the toilet—can prevent nearly half of deaths from diarrhea and almost one-fourth of deaths from acute respiratory diseases. Hand washing promotion in schools plays a role in reducing absenteeism among primary school children.

The Region of the Americas set a new Guinness World Record in 2011 for the most people washing their hands simultaneously in multiple locations. Representatives from Guinness certified that on 14 October, 740,870 people washed their hands simultaneously in different locations in the Americas, including 604,246 people in Peru, 134,790 in Mexico, and 1,834 in Argentina.

### Key facts

- Hand washing is one of the most cost-effective public health interventions for preventing the spread of infectious illnesses.
- Each year, about 3.5 million children die before their 5th birthday due to preventable diseases, mainly diarrhea and acute respiratory diseases.
- According to survey data from the Global School-based Student Health Survey (GSHS), over 15% of schoolchildren in some countries say they rarely or never wash their hands before eating.

### Key PAHO actions

1. *Since 2008, PAHO has been collaborating with the Global Public Private Partnership for Hand Washing to promote the Global Hand Washing Day on October 15<sup>th</sup> each year.*
2. *PAHO has supported the use of the Global School-based Student Health Survey to monitor the prevalence of hand washing and other risk and protective factors among students 13 to 15 years of age in over 30 countries of the Americas, through training, funding and facilitation of partnerships.*
3. *PAHO and its member countries in the Americas will continue to mobilize schools and communities to participate in Global Hand Washing Day to promote hand washing and sanitation on a massive scale and with the goal of breaking a new record each year.*

