

UNICEF delivers handwashing facilities and soap to 22 schools in Windhoek

Windhoek, 2018: UNICEF handed over a consignment of handwashing jerry-cans and liquid soap to 22 schools which are situated in and around areas most affected by the recent Hepatitis E outbreak in Windhoek.

The 22 schools each received 20 handwashing jerry cans and 100 litres of handwashing liquid soap. These supplies will be used to promote the habit of handwashing among pupils as a way to minimise outbreaks of water borne diseases such as Hepatitis E.



Hon. Dr. Bernard Haufiku, the Minister of Health and Social Services, reiterated the importance of handwashing soap at critical times, as one of the most cost effective and easily accessible ways to prevent diseases. He encouraged learners to adopt this practice and to also be agents of change among their families and communities.

“We must use the pupils and our children to drive the message of the disease outbreak and how to take care of ourselves. The children are our disciples. I am also not underplaying the fundamental problems we are facing. But as a community we must be responsible. When the municipality says the areas must be serviced first, let us listen,” said Hon. Dr. Haufiku.

The first case of Hepatitis E was identified in October 2017 and to date, over 1030 cases have been attended to at various health facilities in the district of Windhoek. The settlements of Havana and Goreangab have been the most affected and it is from these settlements where the identified schools are located and from where many learners come.

Data from the Ministry’s health information system has shown that hygiene-related illnesses such as diarrhoeal diseases, pneumonia and malnutrition are the leading causes of childhood illness and death in the country. Diarrheal diseases also contribute immensely to high stunting rates in the country, with 24% prevalence of stunting among children under-five. These diseases among learners often lead to low attendance at school and poor performance.

“Quality education provision and good health, go hand in hand. A pupil who is not clean and cannot make use of improved sanitation facilities will not easily integrate with their peers,” said Hon. Katrina Hanse Himarwa, Minister of Education, Arts and Culture. “We therefore appreciate this gesture from UNICEF as it will help improve sanitation in the 22 schools.”

A rapid analysis concluded at the 22 schools during the height of the Hepatitis outbreak, revealed that the number of water points available for learners to wash hands at critical times such as after using the toilet, are insufficient. Budget allocations for handwashing soap at the schools was low and these factors combined to make the practice of handwashing difficult.

“Illnesses which result from poor sanitation also affects school attendance and the performance of learners. We therefore need to act fast to close sanitation gaps by improving access to safe and adequate water supplies and improving hygienic practices such as hand-washing with soap and safe water at the critical times,” said UNICEF Representative, Rachel Odede, in remarks read by Marcus Betts, UNICEF Deputy Representative.

The supplies were procured as part of the ongoing partnership between UNICEF and USAID which is supporting Government’s actions to promote access to safe water and sanitation, in line with SDG6.