



## MEDIA RELEASE

### **Unite for safety: clean your hands**

**Port Vila, 14 October 2022;** Global Handwashing Day (GHD) is celebrated each year on October 15<sup>th</sup> to increase global awareness of the importance of handwashing with soap. Handwashing with soap and clean water is among the most effective and inexpensive ways to prevent diarrheal diseases and pneumonia, which have claimed the lives of millions of children all over the world. During the COVID-19 pandemic, personal hygienic practices, especially handwashing with soap, is one of the key life-saving behaviours.

This year's Global Handwashing Day theme, health care quality and safety climate or culture" that values hand hygiene and Infection Prevention and Control (IPC), and the slogan is "Unite for safety: clean your hands"



The Vanuatu Ministry of Health would like to emphasise the importance of handwashing and its impact on five (5) important sectors which includes, health, nutrition, education, equity and economic.

**Health:** Handwashing with soap prevents many common and life-threatening infections. Many illnesses start when hands become contaminated with disease-causing bacteria and viruses. This can happen after using the toilet, contact with a child's excreta, coughing, sneezing, touching other people's hands,

and touching other contaminated surface. For example, a single gram of human feces can contain 10 million viruses and one million bacteria, and infant feces are particularly pathogenic.

**Nutrition:** Good nutrition requires more than access to nutritious foods: it requires the body to be able to absorb the nutrients in the food a person consumes. Handwashing with soap is a critical determinant for achieving and maintaining good nutrition. This healthy behaviour plays an important part in preventing micronutrient deficiencies, stunting, wasting, and deaths.

**Education** - Handwashing with soap boosts attendance and is a foundational component of healthy schools. Long before children are of school age, inadequate hygiene practices can lead to diarrhea and other infections that contribute to stunting. Stunting impedes a child's cognitive development, setting students back from their peers even before the first day of school. Good hygiene practices help ensure children are healthy, so they can attend class and learn. Absentees from school due to diarrhoea illness etc.

**Equity-** Access to proper handwashing facilities varies widely across the world, contributing to inequities. Access to proper handwashing facilities—as well as water needed for handwashing—and exposure to effective handwashing promotion that drives people to use them at critical times, vary widely across the world. In many low- and middle-income countries, women and children are traditionally responsible for domestic water supply and maintaining a hygienic household environment. Women often travel long distances in dangerous conditions to collect water for handwashing or other needs.

**Economic Impact:** Lack of investment in handwashing has important economic implications. Lack of investment in handwashing leads to additional healthcare costs, lost or decreased productivity, and loss of life. Handwashing is one of the most cost-effective investments in public health, handwashing is particularly cost effective when compared to other interventions. Hand hygiene interventions have been shown to be effective in reducing drug-resistant infections in hospitals.

The Ministry of Health has developed its first sanitation & hygiene policy (2016-2030) which sets out its vision and targets aligned with Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) 6 to improve handwashing infrastructure and provide guidance on strategies for achieving those targets. Also, the Ministry of Health is responsible to promote hygiene behaviours across the country including handwashing. All the community health workers are giving messages to all communities on the importance of handwashing.

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