



# Water

*Did you have a shower this morning? Make a cup of tea? 780 million people don't have access to clean water. Let's explore the issue.*

## Facts

- Around 1 in 9 people across the world don't have access to clean water. That's a total of 780 million people who can't meet this most basic need ([WHO/UNICEF 2012](#)).
- More than 3.4 million people die each year from water, sanitation and hygiene related causes. Alarmingly, 99% of these deaths occur in developing countries ([WHO 2008](#)).
- Every 21 seconds, a child dies of a water related disease like diarrhoea or malaria ([WHO/UNICEF 2009](#)).
- The population of the world's towns and cities grows by 60 million people each year. The majority of these people move to slums, with no sanitation ([UN Water 2008](#)).
- 2.5 times more people lack water, than live in the entire USA ([WHO/UNICEF 2012](#)).
- Women spend over 200 million hours collecting water every day. This is the equivalent of building 28 Empire State Buildings each day ([WHO/UNICEF 2010](#)).
- More people have access to a mobile phone than a toilet ([UNFPA, 2011](#)).

## What is the issue?

Water is such a basic human need, yet so many people are forced to live their lives without access to clean and safe water. We need water to have any chance of developing as humans or communities. It is vital.

It is staggering that today 780 million people have no access to clean water and 2.5 billion people don't have a toilet to use. People without clean water just can't function properly. They are prone to disease, they can't fight off disease if they do become ill and they lose focus on even the most basic tasks. 'There are not nearly enough hospitals and clinics and they struggle to deal with the needs of those people contracting waterborne diseases like cholera or typhoid.

Communities are unable to thrive. Children can't get an education, as their schools lack even the most basic sanitation. Furthermore, women spend a great deal of time carrying water from the nearest safe supply, meaning they can't take on other vital roles within their communities.

There is hope for the future. Major cities such as London, New York and Paris were plagued by waterborne diseases little more than one hundred years ago. Clean water and sanitation has been one of the most important developments in our history, we must ensure that it now plays an equally important role in the future of some of the world's poorest communities.

## Why is there a lack of access to clean water?

As the population of the world has boomed, the demand for water has grown with it:

- With 7 billion people on the planet, the demand for food has risen. When producing meat or vegetables, water must be used in large quantities.
- Greater industrial demands have led to the overuse and pollution of water sources.
- Poor agricultural practices (using out of date techniques) lead to high levels of wastage.
- Climate change has had an impact on the glaciers, reduced water flow and shrunk lakes. This means water could become even rarer in the future.

## How can I help?

- Think about your own use of water footprint – [use this calculator from National Geographic](#).
- Talk about the issues – discuss the issue of water with your friends and family.
- Use social media – share this factsheet or other resources with your social media networks.
- The more people who engage around the issues water scarcity can cause, the greater impact we can have in making changes to support vulnerable communities.

## Useful links

- [World Health Organisation](#)
- [UN Water](#)