

UK aid and Unilever to target a billion people in global handwashing campaign

The UK government is working with Unilever to fund a global programme to urgently tackle the spread of coronavirus.

The programme will reach up to a billion people worldwide, raising awareness and changing behaviour, to make sure people are washing their hands with soap regularly and disinfecting surfaces.

It is backed by funding of up to £50 million each from both the Department for International Development and Unilever. The programme will also provide over 20 million hygiene products in the developing world, including in areas where there is little or no sanitation.

Such support is vital to stop the spread of the disease in the developing world and will also limit its further potential spread in the UK. Tackling the disease in developing countries will also reduce its potential future impact on the global economy and travel.

Over half a billion pounds of aid from the UK government is already being used to help slow the spread of the virus in developing countries. This includes support for research into vaccines and tests, as well as humanitarian support for developing countries.

International Development Secretary Anne-Marie Trevelyan said:

Health experts have said washing your hands regularly and staying away from other people are the most effective ways to stop this virus from spreading and to save lives.

Many people in the poorest countries lack access to basic handwashing products, such as soap, or are not aware of the urgent need to change their behaviour. The UK Government's partnership with Unilever, will make a real difference, helping to protect both developing countries and the UK from further infections.

The mass awareness campaign will run across TV, radio and print, social and digital media to help change people's behaviour in countries across Africa and Asia, like Kenya, Ghana and Bangladesh. Messages will be tailored to communities in these countries to ensure they are effective.

The initiative will be led by Unilever's hygiene brands Domestos bleach and Lifebuoy soap, which have been driving large scale hygiene behaviour change

programmes for decades.

The announcement builds on a series of actions announced by Unilever in recent days to tackle the coronavirus outbreak globally. The company employs over 6,000 people in the UK.

Unilever CEO, Alan Jope, said:

Lifebuoy and Domestos have a proven track record of running hygiene awareness and education programmes successfully, and we hope that the work we will be able to drive jointly with UK aid will help save lives that could otherwise be impacted by coronavirus.

As the world's biggest soap company, we have a responsibility to help make soap and hygiene products more readily available, and to use our expertise to teach people to wash their hands effectively, whichever brand they choose to use.

The initiative will support British and international NGOs and other partners to run programmes to tackle the spread of coronavirus, through increasing access to hygiene products; a mass public awareness campaign on the importance of handwashing; and a hygiene behaviour change programme. It will also harness the expertise of leading academics, including from the London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine to analyse and ensure the programme is targeted where it has the biggest impact.

DFID and Unilever will work closely with partners to curb the spread of coronavirus in vulnerable countries with poor health systems, saving lives in the process.

Unilever's broad range of hygiene brands in the UK and in low and middle-income countries, means it is well positioned to support the UK government to step up its response to the coronavirus outbreak.

Lifebuoy's handwashing programmes have already reached over 450 million people over the last 10 years, tackling diseases like rotavirus and typhoid which spread easily through people's hands.

Domestos programmes have previously helped 28 million people over the last eight years get improved access to toilets across schools and communities ensuring facilities are maintained clean and safe for longer.

The partnership announced today plans to harness the expertise of leading academics, including from the London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine.