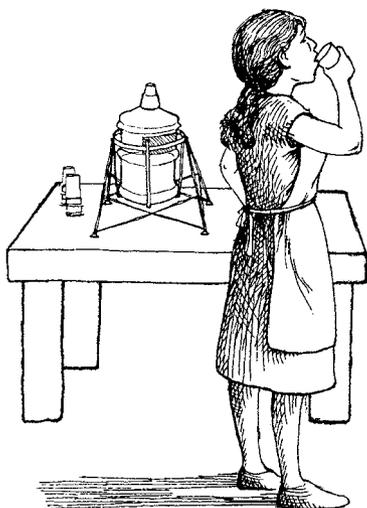


Access to safe water and toilets

29



To stay healthy, you need to drink plenty of clean water and use the toilet when necessary. You need to be able to wash your hands with clean water and soap. Clean, safe water is necessary for emergency showers and eye washes.

Bosses often deny workers these basic necessities as they pressure employees to work faster and take fewer breaks. Limiting access to water and toilets is one way bosses make workers sick. A factory must:

- provide safe drinking water for all workers near their work areas. Allow workers to drink as much and as often as needed.
- allow all workers to use the toilet as needed. You should not have to ask permission, get a pass, or explain why you are going to the toilet. Like breathing, it is a necessary human function.
- add more toilets and urinals so workers do not have to wait in line. It is also easier to keep toilets clean when fewer people use each one.
- make sure each toilet room and stall has a door for privacy.
- place sinks or wash basins with soap and towels around the factory near toilets, drinking water, and eating areas.
- keep toilet rooms supplied with toilet paper, soap, and clean towels.
- keep a supply of pads for monthly bleeding in the women's toilet rooms. Women workers can also make a shared space for sanitary supplies where they can contribute supplies and replace what they use.
- hire workers to maintain and clean toilets.

Safe water

If you do not have to pass urine during the day, or you pass only a small amount of urine, you need to drink more water. Other signs of not drinking enough water are:

- thirst
- headache
- feeling weak or dizzy
- bladder or kidney infection
- nausea
- muscle cramps
- dark-colored urine
- stomach pain

If you work in a hot climate or near hot machines, or if working makes you sweat, you should drink liquids whenever you are thirsty to prevent heat stress. Pregnant women need to drink even more. For more information about health problems caused by heat, see chapter 15: Heat and cold. For more information about pregnancy, see chapter 26: Reproductive and sexual health.

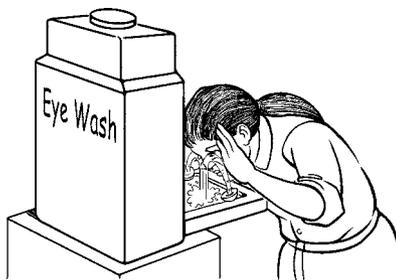
Drinking water is the best way to give your body the liquid it needs. Less liquid stays in the body if you drink tea, coffee, alcohol, or cola drinks. So drink plenty of plain water.

Safe drinking water and clean cups should be available in every work area. The water container should be clearly labeled. If the factory is very hot, the water must be kept cool.

Because illnesses such as colds and flu can be passed from one person to another if you drink from the same cup, the factory should provide clean cups. Wash used cups after every use with warm water and soap or bleach (1 part bleach to 10 parts water), and rinse with clean water.

Water for first aid

Emergency showers and eye washes are necessary in areas where chemicals are used or stored. These first aid systems must provide clean, running water for at least 15 minutes. Running clean, cool water over a body part that is burned or has come in contact with a chemical is one of the best ways to reduce pain, lessen damage to a person's body, and restore their health (see page 175). If there is too little water, this treatment may not work.



If the water for eye washes comes from a tank, change the water every month and flush the pipes every week.

Water for washing hands

All workplaces should have areas where workers can wash their hands with clean water and soap. Washing hands with clean water and soap prevents illness from spreading, can keep wounds or burns clean, and removes chemicals.

Water for washing hands should be available near the toilets. There should also be clean water for hand washing in the work area for workers to wash their hands before going to eat or after working with any materials or chemicals. Areas for hand washing should be labeled and away from anything that might contaminate the water. All areas for handwashing should have soap.

Hand washing is especially important if you handle lead, dyes, or solvents, even if you wear gloves.

Do not use solvents to clean your hands. Use only soap and water.



Toilets and urinals

Workers must be able to use the toilet when they need to. If you cannot pass urine when necessary, you may get a bladder infection. This problem affects women more than men, because women get bladder infections more easily.

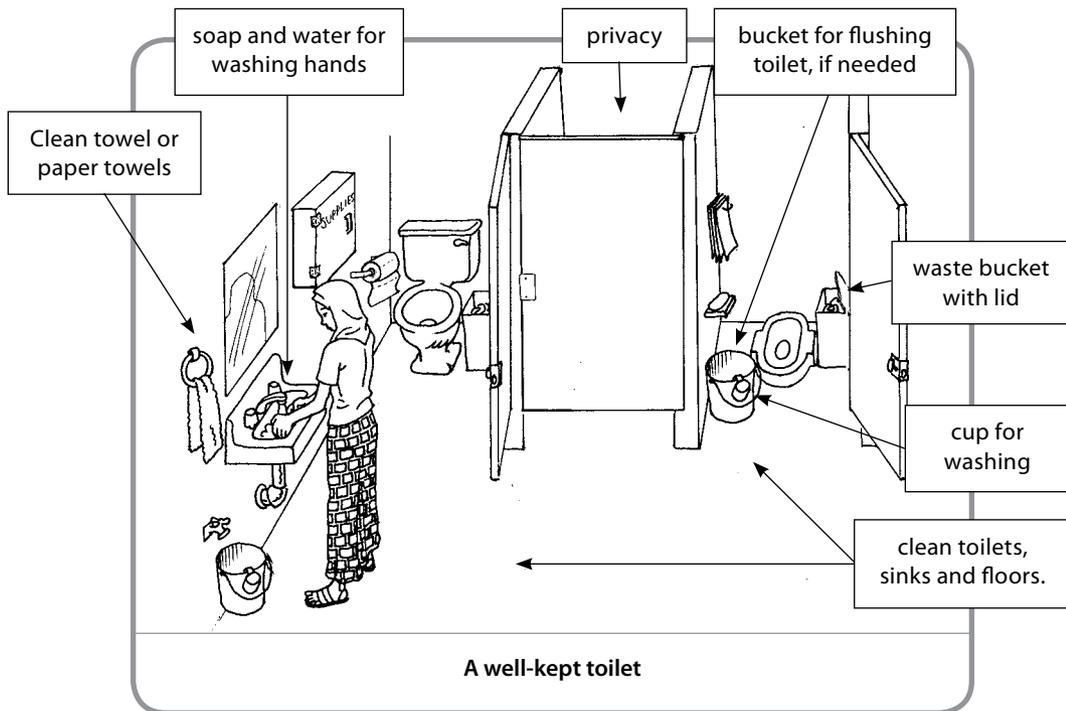
Toilet rooms should be close to work areas, and there should be enough toilets so no one has to wait in line. The minimum is 1 toilet for every 20 men and 1 for every 20 women. In large factories, several toilet rooms located around the factory are better than one large toilet room.

It is the boss's responsibility to make sure toilets, wash basins, and wash areas are kept clean, in good repair, and supplied with toilet paper and towels. Waste buckets should be emptied and cleaned every day. Tell the supervisor and maintenance staff if a toilet stops working.

Women's needs

When women have their monthly bleeding, they need soap, water, and privacy. If they cannot change pads or wash during monthly bleeding, they are more likely to get infections. The boss should keep a supply of clean cloth, cotton, or sanitary pads in women's toilets for women workers to use as needed. Each toilet for women should also have a waste bucket with a lid.

Women are more likely to get infections of the bladder or kidneys, called urinary tract infections or UTIs, when they do not pass urine regularly. A UTI can be treated easily if it is discovered early. However if it is left untreated or if a woman is not allowed to go to the toilet, a simple bladder infection can develop into a serious kidney infection. See *Where Women Have No Doctor*, pages 364 to 368.



Workers take over the bosses' toilet

My name is Elena. I work in an electronics factory in Mexico, near the border with the United States. We used to have only 3 toilets for more than 300 workers. We had to wait in lines, and the toilet rooms were always dirty. When we talked about problems in the factory, the toilets were one of the things that bothered us most. One day, when there was a long line, I said to my co-workers, "Let's use the toilet in the bosses' office." Together we walked into the office. The bosses were surprised and asked us what we were doing. We told them our toilets were dirty and there was a long line. That time, the bosses let us use their toilet.



We told the rest of the workers they could use the office toilet when there were long lines in the factory. When we started going to the office to use the toilet all the time, the bosses got upset. They said, "This is our toilet, you have your own in the factory." We told them we did not have enough toilets, and that the toilets were always filthy. Finally, the boss added 10 more toilets for the workers and kept them cleaner than before.