



U.S. Agency for International Development

Bureau for Global Health

SUCCESS STORIES

HIV/AIDS

Safe Water System Improves Health of People Living with HIV

SAFE WATER SYSTEMS PLAY an important role in saving the lives of some of the world’s most vulnerable communities: children and people living with AIDS. Diarrhea kills three million people annually, mostly poor people. Diarrheal diseases are largely attributed to drinking contaminated water. And chronic diarrhea is a leading killer of people living with AIDS.

New research shows that safe drinking water dramatically improves the health of all poor people, including HIV-positive people. An abstract presented at the 13th International Conference on AIDS and Sexually Transmitted Infections in Africa in Nairobi, Kenya, in September 2003, suggests that use of a safe water system (SWS) resulted in a 37 percent reduction of risk of diarrhea in people with HIV/AIDS. Simply put, SWS is an easy to use, three-step procedure to ensure the availability of clean water.

“Safe water systems could prove to be one of the most important health interventions of the decade.”

—Former Director, USAID/Zambia

In many areas where people do not have access to antiretroviral treatment, the SWS helps those living with HIV and AIDS avoid some opportunistic infections and diarrhea, giving those most vulnerable the opportunity for longer, healthier lives.

The SWS, created by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, is promoted and distributed by Population Services International (PSI), with funding from the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID). It is distributed in eight developing countries: Zambia, Tanzania, Rwanda, Malawi, Madagascar, Kenya, and India, all of which have high HIV/AIDS infection rates, and Afghanistan.

The objective is to make drinking water safe through disinfection and to encourage safe storage of water. SWS consists of three steps: (1) treatment at home with a chlorine solution to disinfect water in order to inactivate the microbial pathogens, the cause of diarrhea; (2) safe



storage of water at home in a plastic container with a narrow mouth, lid, and spigot to prevent recontamination; and (3) behavior change through social marketing, community mobilization, and education to increase awareness about the link between contaminated water and disease. This simple effort to improve general health conditions is vital to improve the health of people living with HIV and AIDS.

The Society for Women with AIDS in Kenya (SWAK) provides an excellent example of how best to distribute this product and educate the consumer. The women go door-to-door with WaterGuard, PSI’s water treatment solution, as well as other products to improve health. The women from SWAK

PSI interpersonal educators, such as this man in Zambia, discuss with low-income people the health benefits of using a safe water system to combat diarrhea, a life-threatening problem to children and people living with HIV/AIDS.

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are PSI's "feet on the street," educating their neighbors, while promoting and selling products. Commissions earned on each sale provide income to the women to help them care for their families. And every bottle of WaterGuard they sell helps prevent diarrhea in their neighbors, many of whom are HIV positive. Said the former director of USAID/Zambia, "Safe water systems could prove to be one of the most important health interventions of the decade."

To read more about the benefits of safe water to people living with HIV and AIDS, see the abstract entitled "Effects of Safe Water and Cotrimoxazole on Diarrhea Among People with HIV," on page 74: http://www.icasanairobi2003.org/ICASA_abstractbook.pdf

<http://www.psi.org/>

http://www.usaid.gov/our_work/global_health/aids/

Multiple Countries, May 2004