

EGPAF's Catalyzing COVID Action Project Supports COVID-19 Testing and Vaccination at the 2022 Kiambu County Global Handwashing Day Event

At the height of the pandemic, Kiambu County had the second-highest number of COVID-19 in all of Kenya. Several reasons caused this high number of COVID-19 cases; the number one reason was proximity to Nairobi, a disease epicenter. Today, the Elizabeth Glaser Pediatric AIDS Foundation (EGPAF) Catalyzing COVID-19 Action (CCA) project in Kenya continues to ensure Kiambu county community members do not let their guard down in the fight against the COVID-19 pandemic. One of their key public awareness campaigns is promoting handwashing.

The EGPAF-CCA team utilized the 2022 Global Handwashing Day (GHWD) in Kiambu county to continue community outreach awareness on COVID-19, and conduct routine COVID-19 screening and testing for the county residents. The GHWD event is held around October 15 each year to encourage and educate people that handwashing with soap is a cheap and easy way to reduce

the spread of COVID-19. Handwashing is also vital to the control of other diseases which also spread more easily in unhygienic conditions.

In 2022, the Kiambaa sub-county of Kiambu county hosted the handwashing event at Karuri primary school grounds. Kiambaa is one of the 12 sub-counties in Kiambu County, with a total population of 236,400 people, according to the 2019 census.

Before the GHWD event, the CCA project worked with Community Health Volunteers (CHVs) to mobilize residents to attend the GHWD event and sensitize them on the availability of free COVID-19 testing services. Despite decreasing COVID-19 infections, many of Kiambaa's residents took time off of their jobs to promote and attend the event; the week-long mobilization campaign attracted an attendance record of 2,000 people.



The CCA project supported testing by laboratory staff during the Kiambu County GHWD event. Photo Credit Koffi Goga October 2022

As part of a joint community engagement strategy, the 2022 handwashing event also promoted COVID-19 testing. They used the messaging that COVID-19 testing would protect individuals and their community members from the spread of the disease. A team of sub-county health officials supported by the CCA project provided the COVID-19 tests in the community. At the venue, CHVs screened residents using Kenya's electronic medical record (EMR)-integrated tablets to screen people for COVID-19 symptoms to determine eligibility for COVID-19 testing. There were also dedicated laboratory officers who carried out the COVID-19 tests. The CCA project provided access to hand sanitizers, chairs, tents, and a public address system used to mobilize throughout the sub-county. In a spirit of true collaboration with MOH, the MOH staff also provided vaccination services.

The event was attended by key health services department leaders, including the County Executive Committee (CEC) member in charge of health. Speaking at the event, the Kiambu CEC of Health, Dr. Joseph Murega, stressed the need to educate the community on the need for proper handwashing practices amongst the student population.

“Behavior change interventions based on social norms should be designed on the sustainability of handwashing with soap and water, which will ultimately lead to a reduction of diarrheal diseases,” said Dr. Murega.



Kiambu County Executive Committee (CEC) of Health Dr. Joseph Murega at a handwashing station at the Global handwashing day in the County. Photo Credit Koffi Goga, October 2022

Also in attendance, were students drawn from primary, secondary, middle-level colleges, and tertiary institutions who presented skits, drama, and poems to underscore the importance of handwashing practices to the attendees. CHVs drawn from various units also gave plays in the Kiswahili language and the Kikuyu dialect to the population present.

The handwashing day culminated with students from Karuri Kenya Medical Training College (KMTc) demonstrating proper handwashing procedures. This was the official World Health Organization (WHO) handwashing technique, which ensures all the parts of the hands and fingers are thoroughly scrubbed and rinsed under running water. The handwashing procedure reads: “Rotational rubbing of left thumb clasped in right palm and vice versa; Rotational rubbing, backward and forwards with clasped fingers of the right hand in the left palm and vice versa; Rinse hands with water; Your hands are now safe.”



A Kenya Medical Training College student from the Karuri campus in the Kiambu sub-county demonstrates the WHO handwashing procedure during the Global handwashing day event in Kiambu County. Photo Credit Koffi Goga October 2022

The CCA team's goal was to ensure that, going forward, residents do not overlook proper hand hygiene. Following this standard, key stakeholders and community members deemed the GHWD event a success:

“While COVID-19 has brought unprecedented attention to the importance of hand hygiene, the [CCA project] has assisted in bringing a culture of hand hygiene to the community. I call upon all sub-counties to work with community units where our CHVs work to inculcate the practice of safe handwashing and raise awareness on the same,” the Kiambu CEC of Health, Doctor Joseph Murega.

The GHWD was a resounding success in the Kiambu County, as community members are now revitalized to prevent the spread of COVID-19. Community members see the importance of going to health facilities to screen for COVID-19, wearing masks, and ensure proper hand hygiene to ensure the virus does not spread in the community. CCA could consider planning to support similar programs elsewhere and in the future.