

Access to toilets for all

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See [Comment](#) page 1592

See [Articles](#) page 1622

2.6 billion people—mostly in Asia, Africa, and Latin America—do not have access to a toilet with a proper waste disposal system so are forced to defecate in the open or use unsanitary conditions. The negative health implications associated with these unhygienic conditions, such as increased risk of water-related illnesses, are obvious and well known. A study in this week's *Lancet* adds to the evidence-base by showing how a large-scale urban sanitation programme in Brazil dramatically reduced the prevalence of diarrhoea in young children. Yet the international community's apathy in adequately addressing sanitation suggests that the public-health argument for dealing with sewage needs to be made—and convincingly won—again.

Last week, the seventh World Toilet Summit, attended by delegates from over 40 countries, was held in India, a country where 700 million people do not have access to a hygienic toilet. This annual summit is organised by the World Toilet Organization and is an opportunity for participants to share experiences, discuss ideas, and develop strategies towards the overall aim of providing

everyone in the world with clean, safe, affordable, ecologically sound, and sustainable sanitation by 2025.

In addition to the technical challenges, there are cultural barriers which also have to be overcome such as educating rural, often illiterate, communities about why sanitation is important. However, some progress has been made. In India, for example, sanitation committees consisting of local people have been formed across the country to ensure that once latrines have been built, they remain clean and hygienic. The Indian Government has also helped the people of Afghanistan—where only 8% of the population has access to appropriate sanitation facilities—by funding five public toilet complexes in Kabul which are already used by over 5000 people a day.

Adequate sanitation is the most effective public-health intervention the international community has at its disposal. Yet 40% of the world's population still lacks access to a toilet. It is time for toilets and sewage disposal systems to be taken more seriously, not just by governments and civil society, but also by funding bodies and the global health community. ■ [The Lancet](#)

For more on the **World Toilet Organization** see <http://www.worldtoilet.org>

For more on the **World Toilet Summit** see <http://www.worldtoiletsummit2007.org>

New guidance on autism

On Oct 29, the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) published new guidelines on the detection and management of autism spectrum disorders, which affect around six children per 1000 in Europe and the USA. The guidelines consist of two clinical reports. The first, *Identification and Evaluation of Children with Autism Spectrum Disorders*, calls for surveillance to start from a child's first visit to the paediatrician and also for universal screening to be done in all children at ages 18 and 24 months. The second report, *Management of Children with Autism Spectrum Disorders*, advocates for intensive behavioural and educational intervention to begin as soon as a diagnosis is seriously considered rather than waiting until a definitive diagnosis is made.

The recommendations made in both these reports are welcome because earlier identification of autism spectrum disorders allows for earlier effective intervention, which can enhance a child's functioning and quality of life. Active screening will undoubtedly lead to more cases of autism spectrum disorders being detected, and programmes that

deliver early behavioural and educational interventions will need to prepare for this likelihood.

Finding the time to implement these new recommendations in a brief office visit is likely to be one of the biggest barriers for paediatricians. Helpfully, both clinical reports form part of a new AAP practical resource for paediatricians, which includes autism spectrum disorder-specific screening and surveillance tools, developmental checklists, management checklists, early intervention referral forms, and family handouts. Paediatricians concerned about time constraints can also make use of screening tools that can be done in the waiting room by parents.

According to a 2004 US survey, 44% of primary care paediatricians reported that they cared for at least ten children with autism spectrum disorder, but only 8% said they routinely screened for the disorder. The AAP's comprehensive guidelines, and the resources that accompany them, should motivate all paediatricians to change these statistics. ■ [The Lancet](#)



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For the **AAP resource kit** see http://www.aap.org/bst/showdetl.cfm?&DID=15&Product_ID=4364

For the **US survey** see *J Dev Behav Pediatr* 2006; 27: 588–94