

A guide to personal hygiene

To reduce the incidence of water-washed diseases, good personal hygiene practices are vital. Some of the problem areas and solutions are illustrated below.

Problem areas

Hair: Dirt sticks more easily to greasy hair, combs and brushes.

Nose: Outer skin is greasy and can collect grease, blocking pores.

Armpits and genital areas: Sweat collects here, encouraging growth of bacteria. Stale sweat smells and can favour growth of pathogens.

Hands: Many materials handled are easily spread to other parts of the body, particularly the mouth and eyes.

Fingers and toes: Sweat between them can soften skin and favour fungal growths.

Nails: Dirt under the nails provides food and shelter for many organisms, including parasite eggs.

Feet: Bare feet can pick up worm larvae as well as other pathogens from the soil and latrine floor.

Remedial actions

Hair: Wash hair, combs and brushed often; at the same time check for head lice and treat if necessary.

Eyes: Wash carefully around the eyes, especially of babies, to avoid excess; avoid rubbing, particularly with dirty hands or cloths.

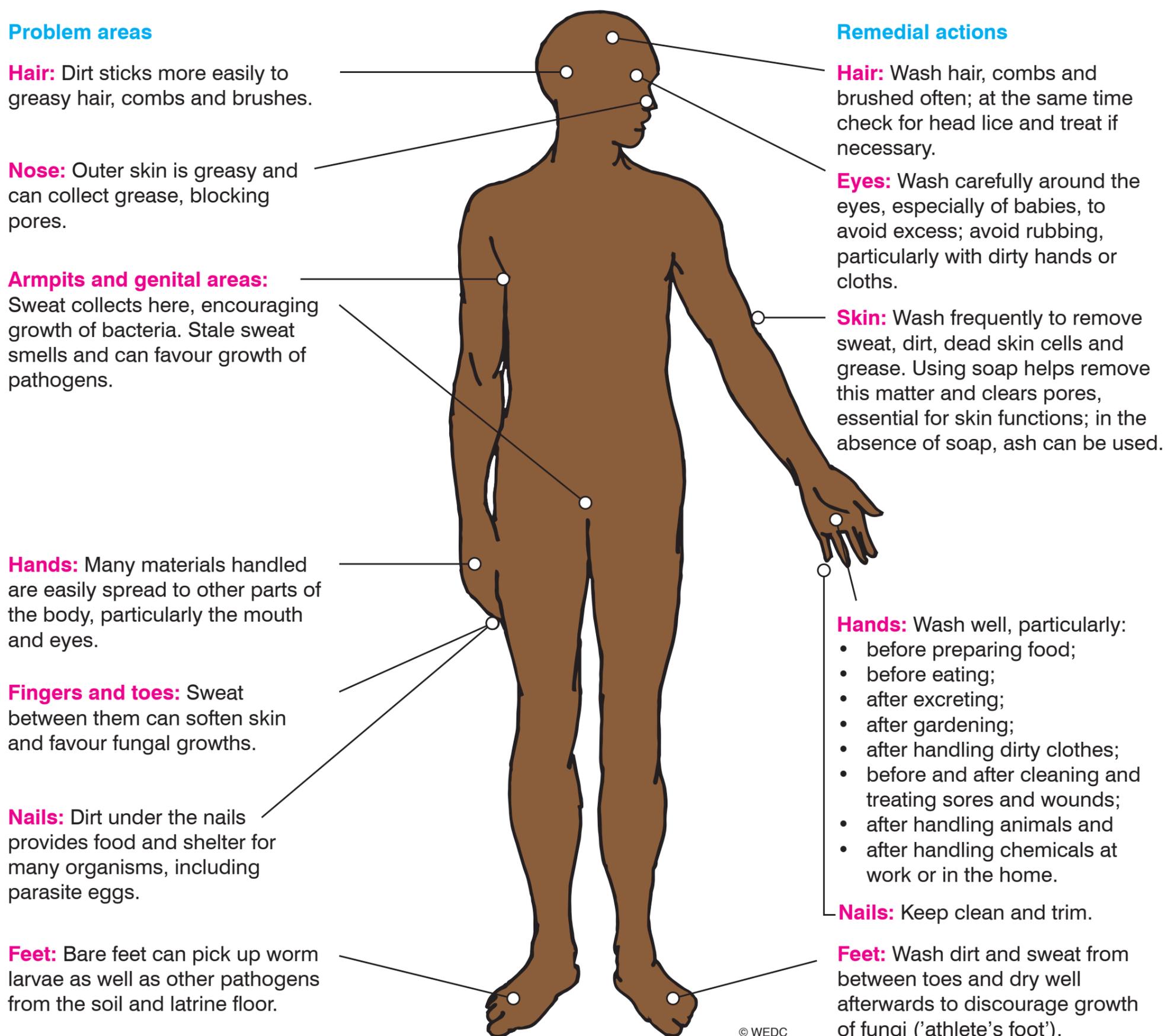
Skin: Wash frequently to remove sweat, dirt, dead skin cells and grease. Using soap helps remove this matter and clears pores, essential for skin functions; in the absence of soap, ash can be used.

Hands: Wash well, particularly:

- before preparing food;
- before eating;
- after excreting;
- after gardening;
- after handling dirty clothes;
- before and after cleaning and treating sores and wounds;
- after handling animals and
- after handling chemicals at work or in the home.

Nails: Keep clean and trim.

Feet: Wash dirt and sweat from between toes and dry well afterwards to discourage growth of fungi ('athlete's foot').



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Adapted from: INCE, M. E. and SHAW, R. J. 1991. 'Eye and skin diseases'. In *The Worth of Water*. Rugby, UK: Practical Action Publishing