

Why Sanitation is So Important

By Kevin



If I were to ask you to identify the most significant medical breakthrough in the past 150 years, how would you answer? For most of us we immediately think of high-profile medical advances, such as the discovery of penicillin and antibiotics, or the invention of the X-ray, the realization that we are products of a basic structure called DNA, the elimination of major disease processes such as smallpox, plague, and others, or the incredible life-saving virtues of automatic de-fibrillation, transplants, and others. In fact, if you were to Google 'Nobel Prize Winning Medical Advances' you will find a host of incredible achievements, all that have improved longevity and quality of life.

And yet, none of them win the prize for being the most significant medical advancement of the past 150 years. The winner may surprise you...

The British Medical Journal recently surveyed more than 11,000 readers, mostly physicians, and asked them the exact same question we asked you: What was the most significant medical breakthrough in the past 150 years?

The winner: Sanitation.

Perhaps the Indianapolis Star said it best, "How can it be that seemingly mundane, homely sanitation -- including sewage, reliably clean water, decent housing -- could

possibly earn more votes than Nobel Prize-winning advances? Because the best measure of a medical advance is not its complexity, but what it does for the length and quality of our lives."

Proper sanitation and hygiene eliminated deadly diseases such as cholera and infection, and paved the way for the creation of a large and sophisticated network of structures and infrastructures that have revolutionized our lives. Today we simply turn on the faucet or flush the commode and viola' we have water to drink and waste water to flush. Today we benefit from a public health system that stands as a constant watch dog to ensure that our sanitation, living and hygiene needs are met.

But what if I were to remove all these conveniences. No running waters. No flushing toilets. No structures, institutions or infrastructure for you to rely upon for sanitation and proper hygiene. What would your life look like?

The hidden danger in natural and man-made disasters is not so much in the actual events, (which is usually what gets all the news), but in the consequences of those events. The most significant of these consequences is disruptions in sanitation and personal hygiene, consequences that transport us back to a time when lack of sanitation was a leading cause of disease and death. Don't take my opinion on it, believe the 11,000 readers of the British Medical Journal.

So, how should a reasonable person prepare for a disruption in structures and infrastructures that support our system of sanitation? Here are three things you should be thinking about to prepare for the big one should it wash up on your shores:

1) Clean water for drinking and washing. Most experts agree that the average person requires two gallons a day of water for cleaning and drinking. This includes water for washing as well as removing waste, (don't forget that most toilets require 3 gallons to flush). SurvivalOutpost.com recommends that you keep a minimum of 7 days water storage for your family, (7 days times 2 gallons times the number of people in your family). A 30-day supply is even better.

2) Emergency Preparedness Kit. Individuals, families and businesses should keep Emergency Preparedness and Disaster Survival Kits on hand that include the necessary sanitation, hygiene, and survival tools and equipment to help you maintain a safe quality of living should you be required to live 'off the grid' for an extended period of time. Most standard Disaster Survival Kits include toilets, toilet bags, antibacterial gels, sanitation wipes, soaps and other sanitation/hygiene necessities.

3) Non-perishable food. Keep in mind, a component of proper sanitation and hygiene is food that does not spoil and expose us to the risk of deadly food-borne diseases. The best foods for long-term storage and emergency preparedness are those that are 'ready to eat' and do not require refrigeration, such as dehydrated foods, military Meals Ready To Eat, canned meats, power bars, etc. As before, we recommend a minimum 7 day supply of nutritious, healthy, high protein foods in your supply.

Remember Occam's Razor: the simplest explanation is almost always the best. It wasn't the incredibly complex medical advances that won the day, it was simple sanitation and hygiene, two things that are well within your control and ability to prepare for.

Stay informed. Stay prepared. Stay safe.

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