



# Our thirsty world

World Water Day is a chance to celebrate this life-giving substance.

In the UK we know we can usually turn on a tap and clean, safe water will come rushing out whenever we want. It's so easy to have a drink, clean our teeth, flush the toilet and wash our hands that we don't even have to think about it.

Not everyone is so lucky. Today, 2.1 billion people – nearly a third of the world's population – live without a supply of safe drinking water in their home. This is something that the United Nations (or UN, a group of 193 countries who work together to make the world a better place) wants to change.

This is a huge challenge, so World Water Day, held on 22 March, is a way of encouraging governments, businesses and communities around the globe to celebrate this precious resource, and think about using it more carefully to reduce waste.

This year's World Water Day theme is "Nature for Water". It will explore how we can work with nature to protect our water sources (where we get water, including rivers, lakes and underground springs) and make sure there's enough for everyone in the future.



Not all children have easy access to water.



**DID YOU KNOW?**  
It takes an average of 3,496 litres of water per day to produce the food for each person in the UK.

## Around the world

A three-year drought has caused a water shortage in Cape Town, South Africa. People have been told to cut down on the amount of water they use or face taps being turned off and having to queue at special stations around the city. The government hopes water supplies will last until the winter rain arrives.

In Bangladesh in Asia, droughts caused by climate change mean more people are moving to urban areas. In the capital city of Dhaka, millions of people are crammed together in homes where there are no proper toilets or running water, and sewage runs straight into rivers. This causes lots of people to fall ill and die from water-related diseases.



Water queues in South Africa.

## Life without water

Have you ever wondered what life would be like without water? Humans need to drink it to survive, but not just any old water; it has to be clean and safe, otherwise we could get ill. We also need water to go to the toilet, wash and clean the places we live, study and work.

Water is also important in building and engineering work. Schools and hospitals can't run without it and transport such as cars, trains and planes wouldn't get very far either. In other words, we rely on water not only to stay alive, but also to study, work, travel and build better lives.

The rest of the planet needs water, too – without it, life simply couldn't exist. Trees and plants can't grow without it and animals and insects need water to survive.



## Protecting water supplies

Organisations such as the UN are working in Bangladesh and other countries to support local businesses so that more people can have safe water. Elsewhere, charities like the Green Belt Movement in Kenya support tree-planting projects that help repair the environment and build stronger communities.

## How can I help?

✓ Small everyday things such as turning off the tap while brushing your teeth could save up to 12 litres of water a day.

✓ You could also put a timer in the bathroom and challenge your family to spend less time in the shower.

✓ Cutting down on food waste is also a good idea. It takes a lot of water to produce our food, especially farming animals for meat, so always finish your dinner!

✓ Visit [worldwaterday.org](http://worldwaterday.org) for more information about saving water, and to read inspiring stories of how others are trying to protect our water sources.



## The pressure on our planet

Nearly all of the world's water – 97.5% – is found in our seas and oceans, so it's too salty for humans to use, and most of the rest is frozen in glaciers. Humans must survive on the small amount of freshwater left, and growing pressure on our environment means some countries are experiencing water shortages.

One of these pressures is a rising human population – the UN thinks we could have an extra billion people on the planet by 2030 – and this means we need



more water to survive, more food to eat and more space to live.

Another pressure comes from climate change – the long-term shift in the planet's weather patterns, mainly caused by burning fossil fuels such as coal, gas and oil. As Earth's temperature rises, our world is experiencing more and more extreme weather conditions. Some countries are receiving much less rain. This causes droughts, which means less water in lakes, reservoirs and rivers.

Environmental damage caused by humans is

also having a big effect. Deforestation (when people chop down large areas of trees to make way for farmland) is not only bad news for the animals and plants that live there, it can also loosen the soil on the ground so that it washes into rivers and lakes, clogging up and polluting the waterways.



**WOW!**  
Pipes in England and Wales leak more than three billion litres of water a day.