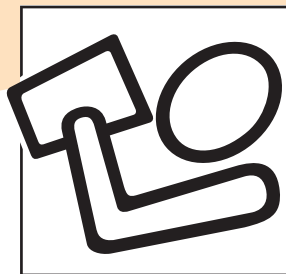




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**Why it is important to share
and act on information
about**



Diarrhoea

Diarrhoea kills over 1 million children every year through dehydration and malnutrition. Children are more likely than adults to die from diarrhoea because they become dehydrated more quickly. About 1 in every 200 children who contract diarrhoea will die from it.

Diarrhoea is caused by germs that are swallowed, especially germs from faeces. This happens most often where there is unsafe disposal of faeces, poor hygiene practices or a lack of clean drinking water, or when infants are not breastfed. Infants who are fed only breast-milk seldom get diarrhoea.

If families and communities work together, with support from governments and non-governmental organizations (NGOs), they can do much to prevent the conditions that cause diarrhoea.

Key Messages:

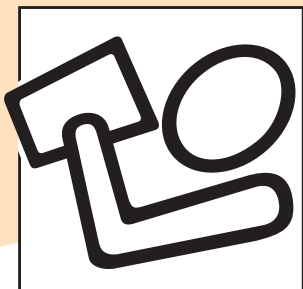
**What every family and community
has a right to know about**

Diarrhoea

1. Diarrhoea kills children by draining liquid from the body, thus dehydrating the child. As soon as diarrhoea starts, it is essential that the child be given extra fluids as well as regular foods and fluids.
2. A child's life is in danger if there are several watery stools within an hour or if there is blood in the faeces. Immediate help from a trained health worker is needed.
3. Breastfeeding can reduce the severity and frequency of diarrhoea.
4. A child with diarrhoea needs to continue eating regularly. While recovering from diarrhoea, the child needs at least an extra meal every day for at least two weeks.



5. If the child is dehydrated with severe or persistent diarrhoea, only oral rehydration solution or medicines recommended by a trained health worker should be used. Other diarrhoea medicines are generally ineffective and could be harmful to the child.
6. To prevent diarrhoea, all faeces should be disposed of in a latrine or toilet or buried.
7. Good hygiene practices protect against diarrhoea. Hands should be thoroughly washed with soap and water or ash and water after contact with faeces, and before touching food or feeding children.



Supporting Information

Diarrhoea

1. Diarrhoea kills children by draining liquid from the body, thus dehydrating the child. As soon as diarrhoea starts, it is essential that the child be given extra fluids as well as regular foods and fluids.

A child has diarrhoea when he or she passes three or more watery stools a day. The more numerous the watery stools, the more dangerous the diarrhoea.

Some people think that drinking liquids makes diarrhoea worse. *This is not true.* A child with diarrhoea should be given drinks as often as possible until the diarrhoea stops. Drinking lots of liquids helps to replace the fluids lost during diarrhoea.

Recommended drinks for a child with diarrhoea:

- breastmilk (mothers should breastfeed more often than usual)
- soups
- rice water
- fresh fruit juices
- weak tea with a little sugar
- coconut water
- clean water from a safe source. If there is a possibility the water is not clean, it should be purified by boiling or filtering.
- oral rehydration salts (ORS) mixed with the proper amount of clean water. (See box on page 83.)

To avoid dehydration, breastfed children should breast-feed as often as possible, and other children should drink the following amounts of liquids every time a watery stool is passed:

- for a child under the age of two years: between a quarter and a half of a large cup
- for a child aged two or older: between a half and a whole large cup.

Drinks should be given from a clean cup. A feeding bottle should never be used. It is difficult to clean bottles completely and unclean bottles can cause diarrhoea.

If the child vomits, the caregiver should wait for 10 minutes and then begin again to give the drink to the child slowly, small sips at a time.

The child should be given extra liquids until the diarrhoea has stopped.

Diarrhoea usually stops after three or four days. If it lasts longer than one week, caregivers should seek help from a trained health worker.

2. A child's life is in danger if there are several watery stools within an hour or if there is blood in the faeces. Immediate help from a trained health worker is needed.

Parents should immediately seek help from a trained health worker if the child:

- passes several watery stools in one or two hours
- passes blood in the faeces
- vomits frequently
- has a fever
- is extremely thirsty
- does not want to drink

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- refuses to eat
 - has sunken eyes
 - looks weak or is lethargic
 - has had diarrhoea for more than one week.

If the child has *any* of these signs, help from a trained health worker is needed urgently. In the meantime, the child should be given ORS solution or other liquids.

If the child passes several watery stools in one or two hours and vomits, there is cause for alarm – these are possible signs of cholera. Cholera can kill children in a matter of hours. Seek medical help immediately.

- Cholera can spread throughout the community quickly through contaminated water or food. Cholera usually occurs in situations where there is poor sanitation and overcrowding.
- There are four steps to be taken to limit the spread of cholera or diarrhoea:
 1. Dispose of all faeces in a latrine or toilet or bury them
 2. Wash hands with soap or ash and water after contact with faeces
 3. Use safe drinking water
 4. Wash, peel or cook all foods.

3. Breastfeeding can reduce the severity and frequency of diarrhoea.

Breastmilk is the best source of liquid and food for a young child with diarrhoea. It is nutritious and clean and helps fight illness and infections. An infant who is fed only breastmilk is unlikely to get diarrhoea.

Breastmilk prevents dehydration and malnutrition and helps replace lost fluids. Mothers are sometimes advised

to give less breastmilk if a child has diarrhoea. *This advice is wrong.* Mothers should breastfeed more often than usual when the child has diarrhoea.

4. A child with diarrhoea needs to continue eating regularly. While recovering from diarrhoea, the child needs at least an extra meal every day for at least two weeks.

A child with diarrhoea loses weight and can quickly become malnourished. A child with diarrhoea needs all the food and fluid he or she can take. Food can help stop the diarrhoea and help the child recover more quickly.

A child with diarrhoea may not want to eat or may vomit, so feeding can be difficult. If the child is around six months of age or older, parents and caregivers should encourage the child to eat as often as possible, offering small amounts of soft, mashed foods or foods the child likes. These foods should contain a small amount of salt. Soft foods are easier to eat and contain more fluid than hard foods.

Recommended foods for a child with diarrhoea are well-mashed mixes of cereals and beans, fish, well-cooked meat, yogurt and fruits. One or two teaspoons of oil can be added to cereal and vegetables. Foods should be freshly prepared and given to the child five or six times a day.

After the diarrhoea stops, extra feeding is vital for a full recovery. At this time, the child needs to eat an extra meal a day, or breastfeed more every day, for at least two weeks. This will help the child replace the energy and nourishment lost due to diarrhoea.

A child is not fully recovered from diarrhoea until he or she is at least the same weight as when the illness began.

Vitamin A capsules and foods that contain vitamin A help a child recover from diarrhoea. Foods that contain vitamin A include breastmilk, liver, fish, dairy products, orange or yellow fruits and vegetables, and green leafy vegetables.

5. If the child is dehydrated with severe or persistent diarrhoea, only oral rehydration solution or medicines recommended by a trained health worker should be used. Other diarrhoea medicines are generally ineffective and could be harmful to the child.

Diarrhoea usually cures itself in a few days. The real danger is the loss of liquid and nutrients from the child's body, which can cause dehydration and malnutrition.

A child with diarrhoea should never be given any tablets, antibiotics or other medicines unless these have been prescribed by a trained health worker.

The best treatment for diarrhoea is to drink lots of liquids and oral rehydration salts (ORS) properly mixed with water.

If ORS packets are not available, dehydration can be treated by giving the child a drink made with four level teaspoons of sugar and half a level teaspoon of salt dissolved in one litre of clean water. Be very careful to mix the correct amounts, as too much sugar can make the diarrhoea worse, and too much salt can be extremely harmful to the child. If the mixture is made a little too diluted no harm can be done and there is very little loss of effectiveness.

Measles frequently causes severe diarrhoea. Immunizing children against measles prevents this cause of diarrhoea.

ORS solution

A special drink for diarrhoea

What is ORS?

ORS (oral rehydration salts) is a special combination of dry salts that, when properly mixed with safe water, can help rehydrate the body when a lot of fluid has been lost due to diarrhoea.

Where can ORS be obtained?

In most countries, ORS packets are available from health centres, pharmacies, markets and shops.

To make the ORS drink:

1. Put the contents of the ORS packet in a clean container. Check the packet for directions and add the correct amount of clean water. Too little water could make the diarrhoea worse.
2. Add water only. Do not add ORS to milk, soup, fruit juice or soft drinks. Do not add sugar.
3. Stir well, and feed it to the child from a clean cup. Do not use a bottle.

How much ORS drink to give?

Encourage the child to drink as much as possible.

A child under the age of two needs at least a quarter to a half of a large cup of the ORS drink after each watery stool.

A child aged two or older needs at least a half to a whole large cup of the ORS drink after each watery stool.

Diarrhoea usually stops in three or four days.

If it does not stop after one week, consult a trained health worker.

6. To prevent diarrhoea, all faeces should be disposed of in a latrine or toilet or buried.

Children and adults can swallow germs that cause diarrhoea if faeces touch the household's drinking water, food, hands, utensils or food preparation surfaces. Flies that settle on faeces and then on food also transmit the germs that cause diarrhoea. Covering food and drinking water protects them from flies.

All faeces, even those of infants and young children, carry germs and are therefore dangerous. If children defecate without using the latrine or toilet, their faeces should be cleaned up immediately and put down the toilet or buried. Keeping latrines and toilets clean prevents the spread of germs.

If there is no access to a toilet or latrine, adults and children should defecate away from houses, paths, water supplies and places where children play and then the faeces should be buried under a layer of soil.

In communities without toilets or latrines, the community should consider joining together to build such facilities.

Water sources should be kept clear of animal or human faeces.

7. Good hygiene practices protect against diarrhoea.

Hands should be thoroughly washed with soap and water or ash and water after contact with faeces, and before touching food or feeding children.

Hands should always be washed with soap and water or ash and water after defecating, after cleaning the baby's bottom, and immediately before feeding children, handling food or eating.

Young children frequently put their hands in their mouths, so it is important to keep the household area clean and to wash children's hands often with water and soap or ash, especially before giving them food.

Other hygiene measures can help to prevent diarrhoea:

- Food should be prepared and thoroughly cooked just before eating. Food left standing can collect germs that can cause diarrhoea. After two hours cooked foods are not safe unless they are kept very hot or very cold.
- All refuse should be buried, burned or safely disposed of to stop flies from spreading disease.