

## Key messages for health education

### What is cholera?

- Cholera is a diarrhoeal illness caused by a bacterial infection in the intestine.
- Cholera causes severe watery diarrhoea and may cause vomiting.
- Cholera can cause death from dehydration (the loss of water and salts from the body) within hours if not treated.

### How is cholera spread?

- Cholera bacteria is present in faeces of infected people.
- Cholera is spread when faeces from an infected person gets into the water people drink or the food people eat.

### How to protect yourself from cholera

#### a) Personal hygiene and sanitation

- Wash your hands with soap, ashes, or lime with safe water:
  - before cooking
  - before eating and before feeding your children
  - after using the latrine (or cleaning your children after they have used the latrine)
  - after taking care of and touching a sick person
- Wash all parts of your hands – front, back, between the fingers and under the nails.
- Use the latrine to defecate. If latrines are not available, defecate away from a body of water and then bury your faeces. Children's faeces should be disposed of in the same way.
- Keep the latrine clean.

#### b) Food: Cook it, peel it or leave it

- Cook raw food thoroughly.
- Eat cooked food immediately, while it is still warm.
- Cover cooked food and store carefully in a cool place.
- Reheat cooked food thoroughly before eating.
- Avoid contact between raw food and cooked food.
- Wash hands before preparing, cooking or eating food.
- Wash vegetables thoroughly with soap and safe water before eating.
- Eat fruit and vegetables you have peeled yourself.
- Wash your cutting board especially well with soap and safe water.
- Wash your utensils and dishes with soap and safe water.

#### c) Safe drinking water

- Collect water from a known safe source (where quality is being monitored on a frequent basis).

- Even if it looks clear, water can contain the bacteria causing cholera.
- Boil water for at least one minute or add drops or tablets of chlorine to it before drinking or using it to wash vegetables or food preparation items.
- Keep drinking water in a clean, covered pot or bucket or other container with a small opening and a cover. It should be used within 24 hours of collection.
- Pour the water from the container – do not dip a cup into the container.
- If dipping into the water container cannot be avoided, use a cup or other utensil with a handle to scoop the water.

#### **d) Water sources**

- Regularly monitor water quality as per protocol.
- Conduct a water safety assessment with the community to eliminate potential or suspected sources of contamination.
- Do not defecate in or near a source of drinking water (stream, river or water hole).
- Do not wash yourself, your clothes or your pots and utensils in the source of drinking water.
- Cover open wells and seal them off properly when not in use to avoid contamination.
- Hung the buckets used to collect water when not in use – they must not be left on a dirty surface.
- Keep areas surrounding wells and hand pump as clean as possible.
- Get rid of refuse and stagnant water around a water source.

### **What to do if you or your family is ill with diarrhoea**

- The biggest danger of cholera is loss of fluid from the body.
- Do not panic, but act quickly.
- The sick person should drink a solution of oral rehydration salts (ORS) made with safe (boiled or chlorinated) water.
- Go immediately to see the community health worker or to the health centre. The sick person should continue to drink ORS while seeking care.
- Encourage continuation of breastfeeding while a child or mother has cholera.

### **Taking care of sick people**

- Wash your hands with soap and safe water after taking care of sick people, touching them or their clothes or bedding, or handling or cleaning up their stools or vomit.
- Do not wash a sick person's bedding or clothing in a water source.
- Avoid direct contact with stools and vomit from a person who is sick with cholera. The fluids should be dumped in the latrine and the carrying vessel carefully cleaned/disinfected.
- Disinfect the sick person's clothing and bedding with a solution of chlorine (0.2%). If chlorine is not available, the sick person's bedding and clothing can be disinfected by stirring for 5 minutes in boiling water and drying in direct sunlight, or by washing with soap and drying thoroughly in direct sunlight.