



23. Chemoprophylaxis

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Overview

- Some diseases are very serious and can kill children or adults. These diseases include plague, meningococcal meningitis, malaria and tuberculosis.
- People who have been in close contact with a person who has these diseases can be infected very easily. However, before they show any symptoms or signs of a disease, people can take medication that will prevent them from falling sick. This is called chemoprophylaxis: it means taking medication as a preventive measure to stop a healthy close contact from falling sick.

What you need to know

- Medications are given to close contacts of a patients with plague, meningococcal meningitis and tuberculosis.
- Close contacts include household members, partners, and children in the same class or dormitory.
- Medications against malaria should be given to children in areas with moderate or severe malaria transmission. (Treatment is given three times during the first year of life at approximately 10 weeks, 14 weeks, and 9 months of age, corresponding to the routine vaccination schedule.)
- Medications against malaria should also be given to pregnant women in areas with moderate or severe malaria transmission. (Care visits should start as soon as possible after the first three months of pregnancy. Each dose should be given at least one month apart. Three or more doses are recommended in the course of each pregnancy.)

Community messages

- Some serious diseases can be prevented if the close contacts of sick people take medication (such as antibiotics).
- The close contacts of patients with plague, meningococcal meningitis and tuberculosis are likely to become sick and may die of these diseases if they do not take chemoprophylaxis (preventive medicine).
- Infants and pregnant women in areas with moderate or severe malaria transmission should receive chemoprophylaxis.

What you can do

- Find out from your health authorities which facilities offer chemoprophylaxis.
- Identify close contacts of patients and refer them to these health facilities for chemoprophylaxis.
- Identify the infants and pregnant women (if you live in a community with moderate or severe malaria transmission). Refer them to health facilities for chemoprophylaxis.
- Get to know all the families with babies under one year of age. Visit them once a month.
- Explain to pregnant women that they must visit the health worker for a check-up. If they live in an area

where malaria is endemic, or which is prone to malaria epidemics, pregnant women should also receive antimalarial medications.

- Listen to the community. Make an effort to understand their fears. Take note of any rumours or misinformation about taking medicines to prevent diseases in healthy people. Communicate clearly to members of the community that it is important to take preventive medication during disease outbreaks.