Overview

- Many diseases can be spread through water. Clean, safe water is essential to stop the spread of many epidemics such as diarrhoea and cholera.
- The germs that make people sick are so small that you need a microscope to see them. Water can look clean when in fact it is not safe to drink until it has been treated.
- As volunteers, you can help to make sure that your community has clean safe water to drink and also to cook and clean.

How can you obtain clean water?
• The best source of safe clean water is a groundwater source, such as a protected well or borehole. "Protected" means it has a concrete apron or edge around the well or borehole (with no cracks) and is fenced to prevent animals from reaching it. • If you normally use a piped water supply in your community, flooding or other natural disasters (such as cyclones) can affect the quality of the water. After flooding, tap water may no longer be safe or clean. In this situation, boil or filter the water or treat it with chemicals.

If safe groundwater is not available, or if you are in doubt about water quality, you can make water clean and safe in other ways

1. Boil water. At least one minute of rolling boil will kill germs.
2. Water purification tablets. These are small tablets that you put in water to kill germs. Each type of tablet has specific instructions for use, so read these carefully before using the tablets. You can give tablets to families in the community to clean their water. Make sure to underline the importance of clean water when you explain how to use the tablets. Monitor the use of the tablets distributed.
3. Filtration. Water can be filtered using ceramic, bio-sand or other types of filter. Make sure you follow the instructions for making and cleaning the filter. Clean the filter regularly.

Each way of making water safe has advantages and disadvantages, and requires equipment and resources (purification tablets, water containers or buckets, firewood, time, etc.). The community needs to be able both to obtain these resources and use them. Ask the **wash** focal point for more information.

Safe water storage and handling
Dirty hands and dirty utensils can also contaminate water, as can flies, other insects and rodents. All efforts to make water clean and safe are pointless if water is not stored or handled properly and hygienically. Follow and share the advice below to make sure water is kept clean and safe.

- Encourage people to **always** wash their hands before they handle drinking water.
- Store water in clean containers. Clean these regularly.
- If a container has a narrow neck, encourage people to clean it regularly with a soap solution, chemical disinfectant (if available) or pebbles. Narrow-necked containers prevent contamination but are harder to clean.
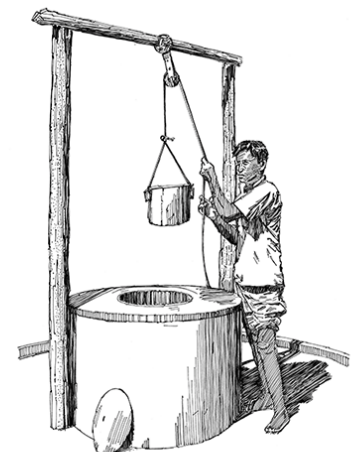
- If a container has a wide neck, encourage people to keep it covered and design a system for removing water without touching it with your hands. Wide-necked containers are easily contaminated but easier to clean.

What you can do

- Make sure that families have clean containers to put water in. Make sure the containers are covered to prevent germs and dirt from getting into the water and making it unsafe.
- Promote clean water use. Encourage members of the community to adopt recommended hygiene practices.
- Encourage people to use household water treatments (such as purification tablets) correctly. If they do not treat their water, find out why.
- Familiarize yourself with the community's cultural, social and traditional practices and beliefs about water and washing.
- Listen out for rumours and incorrect information. Correct these and report them to your volunteer supervisor.

Always remember to
• Use clean containers to transport and store water. • Cover water containers with a lid. • Fetch and handle water with clean utensils. • Boil, filter or treat water with chlorine if you believe that it may not be safe. • Keep your water sources clean and protect them from animals.

Other resources:

Safe water prevents cholera: Clean water storage safe water (visual aid from the Ghana Red Cross Society)

Community messages

04. Storing water properly

05. Using clean safe drinking water