



# Brucellosis

Last update: 2025-06-16

## Key facts

- Brucellosis, also known as “undulating fever” or “Mediterranean fever”, is a zoonotic disease caused by bacteria of the genus *Brucella*, primarily affecting livestock like cattle, sheep, goats, and pigs. The most common species causing human infection are *Brucella melitensis* (which is the most common), *Brucella abortus*, *Brucella suis*, and *Brucella canis*.
- Brucellosis is present worldwide, especially in regions where livestock management and veterinary services are underdeveloped, including parts of Africa, the Mediterranean, the Middle East, and Latin America.
- Humans can acquire Brucellosis through direct contact with infected animals, their tissues, or by consuming contaminated animal products, such as unpasteurized milk or cheese.

## Transmission

- Consuming raw or unpasteurized dairy products, including milk, cheese, and butter, made from infected animals.
- Handling infected animal tissues, organs, blood, urine, or placentas, particularly during slaughter, veterinary procedures, or meat processing.
- Inhaling airborne bacteria, which can occur in laboratory settings, during handling of infected animals
- Environmental exposure in areas with high levels of animal waste.
- From an infected mother to her child during childbirth or through breastfeeding.
- Person-to-person is not common

## Most Vulnerable to Contracting the Disease

- Individuals working in frequent contact with animals or animal products, such as farmers, veterinarians, abattoir workers, and laboratory personnel.
- Consumers of unpasteurized dairy
- Travelers to or living in endemic areas.

## Signs and symptoms

### In animals

- Typically, the sign of the disease in animals is not evident until reproductive signs occur
- Abortion in infected pregnant female animals (sometimes) or some may give birth to give birth to weak and vulnerable animals.
- Swelling of the testicles in males (sometimes)
- Arthritis (sometimes)

- In horses, there may be a swelling of the neck or back (called fistulous withers or poll evil) Infected pregnant mares may either abort

*Note: One of the most important implications of brucellosis is that it causes poor reproductive performance, due to abortions, infertility, retention of placenta, stillbirth or birth of weak offspring. This results in huge economic losses to dairy, sheep, goat and pig farmers.*

### **In humans**

- Acute Phase
  - Fever, often fluctuating (undulant fever)
  - Sweating, particularly at night
  - Fatigue and general weakness
  - Muscle and joint pain
  - Headaches
- Chronic Phase
  - Persistent or recurrent fevers
  - Arthritis and joint pain
  - Swelling of the testicles and scrotum area
  - Neurological symptoms such as depression, fatigue, and headaches

## **What can you do to prevent and control an epidemic?**

- The most effective prevention strategy is the elimination of infection in animals.
- Monitoring the community and identifying sick people and animals
  - Detect sick people and animals quickly for referral to the appropriate health facilities
  - Monitor the community for clusters of sick or dead animals
    - Report any clusters to your supervisor, animal health and welfare authorities and/or health authorities
    - Encourage quarantining sick animals from healthy ones
      - Discourage community members from taking sick animals to markets or other places where they may encounter other animals or humans
    - Encourage minimal contact between sick animals and humans
    - Limit contact between sick and healthy animals, stop sick animals from reaching the market, etc.)

### **Treatment and management**

- Vaccination of cattle, goats and sheep is recommended in areas with high prevalence rates of the disease among the animal populations.
- Refer suspected human and animal cases for screening and treatment
  - Refer people to the appropriate health facilities
  - Notify animal health and welfare authorities and professionals or care providers (such as veterinarians) of suspected cases in animals

- If antibiotic and supportive treatment is available (for animals or people), encourage people to seek and complete treatment as directed by health care providers
- Provide psychosocial support to the sick person and their family members

## **Safe animal handling**

- Safe handling and slaughtering practices including supervision and meat inspection
- People working with animals or animal products should wear protective clothing and equipment and follow recommended hygiene practices

## **Personal protection and hygiene**

- Promote handwashing with soap
  - BEFORE: preparing food; eating; feeding a child; treating wounds; or caring for sick people
  - AFTER: using the toilet or cleaning a baby; touching garbage or waste (especially when dealing with rodent waste); touching or feeding animals; blowing nose, coughing or sneezing; treating wounds; or caring for sick people
- In agricultural work and meat-processing, workers should wear protective clothing and ensure correct handling and disposal of afterbirths, animal carcasses and internal organs

## **Food and water hygiene and safety**

- Cook animal products thoroughly (including meat, milk and offal).
- Boil/heat milk before drinking it to kill harmful germs and prevent disease that can spread from animals to humans.

## **Social mobilisation and health promotion**

- In countries where eradication in animals through vaccination or elimination of infected animals is not feasible, prevention of human infection is primarily based on raising awareness, food-safety measures, occupational hygiene and laboratory safety.
- Establish education campaigns about avoiding raw, untreated and unsafe milk products.
- Find out the specific advice being given by health and other relevant animal health authorities
  - Liaise with health professionals in both human and animal health sectors for health advice and promotion messages for best health practices.
  - Promote recommended health practices (such as safe animal handling and use of protective clothing and equipment)
- Model following this advice and inform community members of current health practice advice
- Offer support and encouragement to people to help them follow the advice
  - Try to gain understanding about if and why health advice is not being followed
  - With the advice of your supervisor and health authorities, work with communities to overcome barriers to following health advice and recommended practices

# Mapping and community assessment

- Make a map of the community.
- Mark the following information on the map:
  - How many people and animals have fallen sick with brucellosis? Where?
  - How many people have died? Where? When?
  - How many animals have died? Where? When?
  - Who and where are the vulnerable people? (where are farms, slaughterhouses, wool mills, etc?)
  - Where are the handwashing facilities in the community? (are there stations at animal markets and other areas where livestock gather?)
    - Are soap and water always available?
  - Where are the local health facilities and services? (include traditional healers)
- Record the following information on the back of the map:
  - When did people and animals start to fall sick with brucellosis?
  - How many people live in the affected community? How many are children under five years of age? How many people work with livestock regularly?
  - Do people cook meat and milk thoroughly before eating it?
  - Do any animal health agencies, veterinarians or agriculture ministry agencies work in the area?
  - What are the community's habits, practices and beliefs about caring for and feeding sick people?
  - What are the community's habits, practices and beliefs about care and slaughter of animals?
    - Are there societal, cultural or religious beliefs or perceptions about the care and slaughter of animals?
  - What are the community's habits, practices and beliefs about sick or dead animals?
    - How do people dispose of animal carcasses (by burning, burying, eating, etc.)?
  - Is a social mobilisation or health promotion programme in place?
  - Which sources do people use/trust the most for information?
    - Are there rumours or misinformation about brucellosis? What are the rumours?
  - What role do women play in livestock management (including caring for animals, gathering animal feed and selling animal products in markets)?

## Volunteer actions

- [01. Community-based surveillance](#)
- [02. Community mapping](#)
- [03. Communicating with the community](#)
- [04. Community referral to health facilities](#)
- [19. Mental Health and Psychosocial support \(MHPSS\)](#)
- [29. Hygiene promotion](#)
- [31. Good food hygiene](#)
- [32. Sanitation](#)
- [33. Encouraging the use and maintenance of latrines](#)
- [34. Handwashing with soap](#)
- [41. Handling and slaughtering animals](#)

- [43. Social mobilization and behaviour change](#)
- [44. Dealing with rumors](#)

## Other resources

- World Health Organization (WHO); [Brucellosis](#); 2020
- World Health Organization (WHO); [Brucellosis in Humans and Animals](#); 2006
- <https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/9789241547130>
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC); [About Brucellosis](#); 2024
- World Organisation for Animal Health (WOAH); [Brucellosis](#). (n.d.)
- World Organisation for Animal Health (WOAH); [Brucellosis](#); 2022

# 01. Community-based surveillance

## Overview

- Community-based surveillance is the systematic detection and reporting of significant public health events (such as sudden illness or death in people or animals) within a community by community members and volunteers. It is a simple, adaptable, low-cost public health initiative designed to complement early warning systems for potential epidemic diseases.
- Volunteers use something called a “community-case definition” to detect and report signs and symptoms of potential diseases, health risks and events, and support in community actions and response of local health authorities. Community case definitions are designed to align with the local language and do not require medical training to report on.
- Information discovered during surveillance should be shared with the local branch and health authorities based on the agreed protocol. Where relevant, (e.g. for zoonoses or environmental health events) information should also be shared with animal health and environmental health authorities.
- Community-based surveillance (CBS) can be done alongside other health, WASH or community engagement activities in your community, and therefore is not a stand-alone activity, but one that is useful to partner with other community-based activities.
- Community-based surveillance aids in
  - Early detection of public health risks within the community
  - Complementing early warning systems, extending them to the community
  - Linking early detection to early action within the community

## What to do and how to do it

- Preparation activities
  - Work with supervisors in mapping community needs and human, animal and environmental disease priorities (see Action tool [Community mapping](#))
  - Familiarize yourself with the disease that may be present in your community including signs and symptoms
  - Establish who is vulnerable in the community. Doing this will help you to identify people who are more likely to fall sick
  - Ensure referral mechanisms are clear in case community members fall sick and require referrals to health facilities for care.
  - Engage in community engagement activities such as mobile cinema, house-to-house visits, etc. to remain active and a known resource in the community.
- Recognize
  - Detect signs and symptoms corresponding to human, animal or environmental health risks or events in your community aligned with community case definitions
  - When you detect people who are sick with the disease, assess how severely ill they are and whether they need to be referred to a health facility (see Action tool [Referral to health facilities](#)).
  - Record the health risk or event you detected to ensure it can be followed-up
- Report
  - Report on the detected health risks or event in your community to your supervisor based on the methodology you are trained on (for example, SMS, phone call, or mobile application). *Remember that reporting must be systematic. To avoid confusion, everyone who reports should follow the same methods*

*agreed on in the protocol and in the training.*

- Your supervisor will then cross-check the report ensuring it meets the community case definition or unusual event requirements agreed on with health authorities. If matching, the supervisor will escalate the alert to the local health authorities for a response or investigation
- After verification, the supervisor will notify relevant authorities in animal and environmental health for significant animal, zoonotic and environmental health events, especially those that portend a risk to human health.
- React
  - Begin community-level activities based on the health risk following proper safety precautions
  - Referral or care at home
    - Communicate specific health messages and information, and refer sick people promptly to health facilities
    - If sick people can be cared for at home, show their families what to do and provide them with information and supplies, where possible. Use corresponding “volunteer actions” in the ECV toolkit corresponding to the suspected epidemic risk.
  - Support health authorities in their investigation or response following-up on the alert
  - Where relevant, collaborate with and support officials in the animal and environmental health sectors for joint investigation, response and information sharing.

Additional resources on community-based surveillance: <https://cbs.ifrc.org/>

## Community messages



24. Finding sick people

## 02. Community mapping

### Overview

A map of the community enables you to connect issues or problems with particular places and makes information easy to see. Maps are often easier to understand than words.

Mapping aids in:

- Identifying risks and exposure to risk
  - Who and what are most exposed
  - What are they exposed to
- Show existing problems and vulnerabilities (some might make the current threat more serious)
- Understanding resources within the community that might be useful in managing the epidemic
- Obtaining information about other sectors (such as livelihoods, shelter, WASH, infrastructure etc.) that might be influenced by the epidemic, or that might be useful in managing the epidemic
- Analysing links and patterns in the exposure and spread of the epidemic - which may include human-to-human transmission dynamics, exposure from animals, vectors or food, behavioural risks, and environmental health drivers.

It is important to create the map together with community members. This helps communities to be active and to be participating members in the care offered by the Red Cross Red Crescent and volunteers.

Community mapping is especially useful in epidemics because it helps to see where the biggest problems and needs are and helps to identify risks and resources such as health posts, emergency vehicles, access roads, shelters, water sources, and so on. Maps can be used to support prevention, preparedness and response to an epidemic.

### How to make a community map

If possible, obtain or create a digital map of the community. If not available, it is possible to draw a simple spatial map that shows the community and all its key reference points. While keeping the fundamental principles of data protection, a community map should include the following:

- The whole community: concentrations of people, their houses, and who lives where
- The main shared/public locations in the community, such as schools, health centres, places of worship, water sources, markets, playgrounds and community meeting centres, communal livestock farming and livelihood areas such as cattle kraal, live bird markets, abattoirs, etc.
- The location of people who are most at risk [if you can identify them]
- Where the epidemic started and how it is spreading [if known and possible to identify]
- Health hazards and risks (e.g. improper rubbish disposal sites, large vector breeding sites)

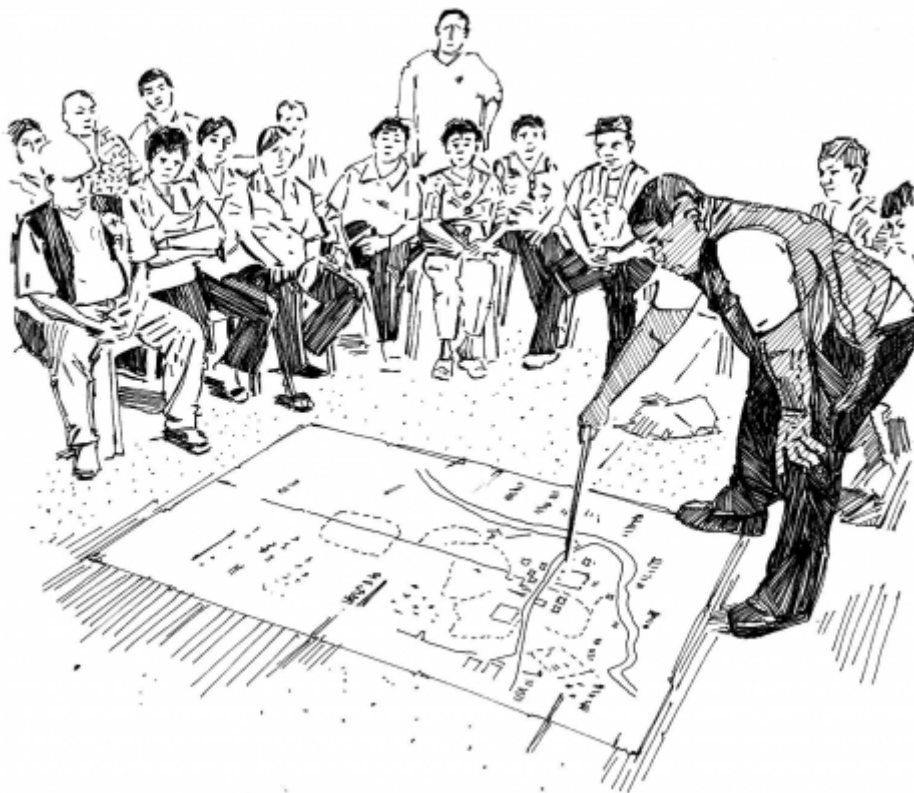
### Using the community map

The map can be used to mark new cases and/or referred cases. Do as follows:

- Form teams to cover certain areas of the map.



- Ensuring the participation of members from the community, each team should find out what it can about its area (how many people are sick, who is vulnerable, how many have been referred to health authorities, any other relevant information). If a zoonotic disease outbreak is suspected or implicated, find out who among the community members is keeping animals, how many animals are sick or have died, and/or presence of vectors in households, environment or even in surrounding water bodies. Work with your manager to target and prioritize those who are most at risk. This will require targeting geographically and, within those identified areas, targeting the most in need based on a vulnerability and capacity analysis that includes a gender and diversity analysis.
- Combine the maps of different teams. In doing this, you will be able to see:
  - Which areas of the epidemic you are covering, which areas you may not be covering, and details of each area. This will help you plan your actions. Some of these actions might include: environmental clean-up; distribution of bed nets; immunization campaigns; quarantine, animal biosecurity measures and other activities associated with managing the epidemic.



Making a community map

## 03. Communicating with the community

### Overview

Communicating during an epidemic can be difficult. Disease outbreaks, especially new ones, can cause uncertainty, fear and anxiety that can result in circulation of rumours, disinformation and misinformation. People may not trust the authorities, the health system or organizations including the Red Cross Red Crescent. They may not listen or may not believe the information they receive from people or organizations they do not trust. People may also be overcome with grief for those who are sick or who have died.

Sometimes, communities have strong beliefs that are different from the preventive and protective social measures promoted by the authorities and healthcare providers. They may believe strongly in their own cultural practices, traditional medicine, or other methods that might not prove effective against the disease. They may not accept certain treatments (including medicines and vaccines).

In many countries messages take the form of directives and one-way-communication. However, community engagement and participation have played a critical role in successful disease control and elimination campaigns in many countries

During a disease outbreak, trusted communication with the community is vital. To build trust, two-way communication is important. "Two-way" means volunteers should both *give messages to* AND *receive messages from* the community. Community members must feel respected and listened to and should have the opportunity to share their beliefs, fears and concerns. To accept volunteers' messages, community members must be able to trust you and have confidence in what you say. Once you understand the beliefs, fears and concerns of community members, you can provide them with truthful and accurate messages.

Providing health messages that are consistent, clear and easy to understand also helps to build trust. Giving accurate information to the community is critical, especially when it is necessary to persuade people to adopt safe practices (which might be different from what they would normally do). Some changes in behaviour that may be promoted are things such as:

- Accepting vaccinations or other medical treatments
- Washing hands with soap at crucial times
- Wearing personal protective equipment
- Burying loved ones in ways that are different from what they would normally do (safe and dignified burials)
- Practising social distancing
- Wearing insect repellent or sleeping under bed nets
- Agreeing to be isolated from others to avoid infecting them
- Preparing food and water differently (often by cleaning, boiling or cooking thoroughly)
- Quarantine and culling of animals (which in the case of livestock animals, is often a main source of food, nutrition and livelihood and may be difficult to accept by the farmers who own them)
- And other recommended public health measures

### What to do and how to do it

#### *Communicating in an epidemic*

- Engage and involve community leaders and community members
  - Find out where the community obtains its information: Who do they trust to give them health

information (for example: health authorities, community or religious leaders, doctors, traditional healers)

- Work with communities to identify, choose and plan appropriate solutions for stopping the spread of disease
- Talk to members of the community about their ideas, fears, beliefs and actions
  - Try to understand how much they know about the disease and its transmission
  - Try to understand beliefs and practices that might impact the spread of the epidemic
  - Try to understand what motivates or helps them to change behaviours
  - Try to understand what stops them from changing their behaviour
- Use different methods of communication
  - Use two-way communication when possible
    - When you understand the community's beliefs, fears and concerns, try to address these in your own messages
  - Sometimes, one-way communication methods are used to spread health messages to large numbers of people quickly
    - One-way communication methods should always be accompanied by two-way communication methods to ensure the community perspectives are known and listened to
  - People learn and retain information differently. It is important to use different methods
    - Communities are composed of different people and groups who may have different communication preferences or needs.
      - Think about how to target different groups, especially those who are hidden, stigmatized or considered "different" because of their religion, sexual orientation, age, disability, illness, or for any other reason:
        - Think about where you will go to reach them
        - Find out if they trust the same or different sources than other groups within the community
        - Discover if they have different access needs, such as language translation or in case of a disability – a different method of communication
    - When choosing methods of communication, consider what people prefer, trust and can access easily
      - Think about the characteristics of your target groups (for example, do they have access to media, such as radio or television? Can they read if they receive pamphlets of information and in what language? Are they accustomed to getting information from social media? Etc.)
      - Think about the resources you have access to (for example: do you have access to poster printing? Is there an appropriate location within the community where you can offer to answer questions or give out information? Etc.)
      - Consider the content of your message(s) and think about the most appropriate way to share that content in the specific context (for example: targeting men and women separately)
- Communication should be:
  - **Simple and short.** People should be able to understand messages easily and be able to remember and repeat them accurately and without difficulty.
  - **Trusted.** Delivered by people the community trusts, by a method the community trusts (for example: radio, television, posters, town-hall discussions, market meetings etc.).
  - **Accurate and specific.** Always provide correct and precise information. Messages should be consistent and should not be cause for confusion. *If* messages must change (due to new and advancing information about the epidemic), be honest and clear about what has changed and why.
  - **Focused on action.** Messages should be action-oriented and should advise members of the community about what they can do to protect themselves and others.
  - **Feasible and realistic.** Make sure that people have the capacity and resources to carry out the actionable advice you give.
  - **Context-specific.** Information should reflect the needs and situation of the specific community. In all your messages, take account of social and cultural factors that might encourage community members to

adopt safer behaviours (such as accepting vaccines) or prevent them from doing so.

### ***Different ways of communicating***

There are many, many ways to communicate with communities. The following one and two-way methods of communication are some examples you might consider. Methods can (and should) be combined to ensure accessibility to as many community members as possible.

- One-way communication methods
  - Video, films, television commercials
  - Songs, poems, drama, role-play or theatre, or other edutainment methods
  - Community announcements such as: community town-criers, loud-speaker announcements, SMS or WhatsApp, mass messaging, social media messages, radio broadcasts
  - Posters, billboards
- Two-way communication methods
- Door-to-door visits
- Meeting with key informants such as: community or religious leaders; traditional healers or midwives; teachers; elders, etc.
- Community discussions encouraging participatory methods such as: three pile sorting, voting charts, mapping, polling, barrier analysis, community planning
- Use of feedback and suggestion boxes or presence of trusted focal persons to receive anonymous feedback or messages from community members.

### ***Pay attention to rumours***

Rumours can cause panic and fear or can promote unsafe practices. Under the influence of the rumours, communities can lose trust in the health authorities, and they may lose belief in the ability to stop the epidemic. Rumours sometimes cause people to reject interventions that could prevent the spread of disease. Volunteers must:

- Listen for rumours or incorrect information.
  - Note when and where a rumour was heard and report it to your volunteer supervisor or National Society focal point immediately
  - Try to understand why the rumor is spreading fast and of what importance it is to the community. For example, is it just based on lack of knowledge or fear of the unknown, or is it associated with certain socio-cultural beliefs or associated with the stigmatization of a certain demography of people?
- Correct the rumour
  - Give the community clear, simple facts about the disease
  - Reiterate and explain clearly what they can do to protect themselves and others

## 04. Community referral to health facilities

### Overview

During an epidemic, sick people frequently cannot be treated at home or by volunteers or family. They require medical care and need to go for treatment to a health clinic or hospital.

When carrying out epidemic prevention and control activities in the community, always keep the idea of referral in mind.

A community referral is a recommendation (often made by a community volunteer) to seek services at a health facility or from a health care professional. This recommendation is usually based on the identification of signs of disease or the risk that a disease poses to a person, family or community. A community referral is not a confirmation of illness, nor is it a guarantee that any specific treatment will be given. A diagnosis, and any subsequent treatment, is determined by a health professional and not by the community volunteer.

### What to do and how to do it

#### *Identifying people who need to be referred*

- Learn the symptoms of the disease that is causing the epidemic and the signs that indicate that affected people should be referred to health facilities
- Always keep your own safety and protection in mind
  - With the advice of your supervisor, find out how you can tell when a person is severely ill and needs to be referred

#### *Map and visit referral facilities*

1. Unless there is only one referral facility in the community, the selection of a health facility for volunteers to which to send community referrals should be done by a health professional supporting or working at the National Society and validated by the National Society leadership. Volunteers cannot decide alone to which facilities they can send referrals.
2. Once a health facility has been identified and validated by the National Society, with the support of your manager, visit health facilities and talk to doctors and nurses to coordinate referrals
  - Inform them about Red Cross Red Crescent branch activities in which you are involved and how this may lead to community referrals from branch volunteers trained in epidemic prevention and control
  - Discuss the best method for sending sick people from the community to the health facilities:
    - Public transport?
      - Can people access it? Pay for it?
      - Can sick people use it?
      - Is there a risk of disease transmission to other passengers?
    - Ambulance services?
      - Does the health facility have ambulances?
      - Does the Red Cross Red Crescent branch have ambulances?
      - Can people access them? Pay for them?
      - How do you contact the ambulance?
    - Is the disease highly infectious and requiring special transport?

- If the disease is highly infectious (like Ebola or Marburg), special transport must be arranged so that there is no risk that other people could not be infected
- Tell them about your activities and how you plan to do referrals. Take advice from them

### ***Plan and prepare to make referrals***

1. Plan how referrals will be made and facilitated
  - Can the National Society provide transport?
  - Do people have money to pay for transport?
  - Does the health facility require prior notification of the referral? If so, how will the health facility be informed of the referral?
2. Always carry the relevant disease tool with you when you are doing community-based referrals
  - This will help you remember what you should know about the disease and its symptoms.

### ***Making a referral***

1. Volunteers act on behalf of their National Society and must have the consent of the National Society before undertaking activities. They should be trained in the principles of the Red Cross Red Crescent Movement and should have appropriate training and supervision before making community referrals.
2. Volunteers should obtain the consent of the person to the referral, or of the guardian if it is a child.
3. Volunteers should work to uphold these principles:
  - Confidentiality – It is important to keep information about community members private and not to discuss people's health, healthcare or other private details with others in the community. Remember that breaches of confidentiality often happen unintentionally, for example, when discussing the day's work with friends or family members.
  - Respect – It is important to respect people's choices and decisions, even if you do not agree with their choices.
  - Safety – If you have concerns about the safety or security of a person (in relation to the community referral, or any other aspect of their situation), you should discuss it with your supervisor to find a safe solution if possible.
4. When you refer, always explain clearly to the family concerned what the disease may be, what its symptoms are, and why you think referral is necessary.
  - Give the family information about the health facilities available and how to reach them by different means of transport
    - Help the family if special transportation is needed



## Community messages



24. Finding sick people

# 19. Mental Health and Psychosocial support (MHPSS)

## Overview

### *Normal reactions to abnormal events*

It is normal and expected to have strong reactions to abnormal and difficult events. People and communities who experience difficulties may be affected emotionally, mentally, physically and/or socially. Some of these effects may include:

#### Normal reactions to abnormal events

- **Emotional.** Anxiety, grief, guilt, anger, irritability, frustration, sadness, shame, numbness, loss of hope, loss of meaning, feeling of emptiness.
- **Mental.** Loss of concentration, memory loss, confusion, intrusive thoughts, difficulties in decision making, disorganized thought.
- **Physical.** Increased heartrate, sleeping problems, aches (stomach, head), back and neck pain, muscle tremors and tension, loss of energy, inability to rest and relax.
- **Social.** Risk taking, over- or under-eating, increased intake of alcohol or cigarettes, aggression, withdrawal, isolation.

### *Psychosocial support*

- The term “psychosocial” refers to the dynamic relationship between the psychological and social dimensions of a person, where the dimensions influence each other. The psychological dimension includes emotional and thought processes, feelings and reactions. The social dimension includes relationships, family, community networks, social values and cultural practices.
- “Psychosocial support” refers to actions that meet the psychological and social needs of individuals, families and communities. Psychosocial support (PSS) requires training and supervision. Your supervisor can help you access the appropriate training before you begin to offer PSS to community members. They will also provide you with supervision and support while you provide PSS.
- We provide psychosocial support to help people who have been affected by a crisis. Volunteers should explain what psychosocial support is and if they are appropriately trained, they should offer to provide it to those who wish to receive it. Early and adequate psychosocial support can prevent distress and suffering from turning into more severe mental health problems.
- Psychosocial support during emergencies should ensure safety and promote calm, connectedness, personal and collective efficacy, and hope.

## What to do and how to do it

Psychosocial support activities include:

- Psycho-education
  - Explain how to identify signs of psychosocial distress



- Provide advice on how to cope during outbreaks (e.g. maintaining a daily routine as much as possible; calling friends and family to keep in touch and show care for each other; fact-checking information about a disease against trustworthy sources)
- Share tips about relaxation
- Health education can have a positive psychosocial impact:
  - Health education can help community members to better understand their health status, regain a sense of control and cope with their situation
  - While being ill, and even after medical clearance, it can be difficult for people suspected of infection to resume normal life. Educating communities about the nature of the disease, how it spreads – and does not spread – and how to protect against it is an important tool against fear and stigma
- Active listening: Ensure the affected population can raise their concerns, provide suggestions and feedback. This information is used to reduce fear, address rumours and misinformation and increase sense of agency and dignity of the affected population.
- Life skills and vocational skills activities/lessons.
- Creative activities, sports and physical activities.
- Restoring family links.
- Child friendly spaces.
- Supporting memorials and traditional burials.
- Support and self-help groups
  - These include efforts to help people in isolation or quarantine maintain contact with their relatives and friends.
  - Community volunteers that respond to crises are also exposed to loss, devastation, injury and death. It is therefore important to seek support from managers when needed, and to create a supportive environment by showing concern for staff and other volunteers.
- Psychological first aid

## 29. Hygiene promotion

### Overview

Hygiene promotion is a term used to cover a range of strategies aimed to improve people's hygiene behaviour and prevent the spread of disease. Hygiene promotion enables people to take action to prevent water, sanitation and hygiene-related diseases by mobilizing and engaging the population, their knowledge, and resources.

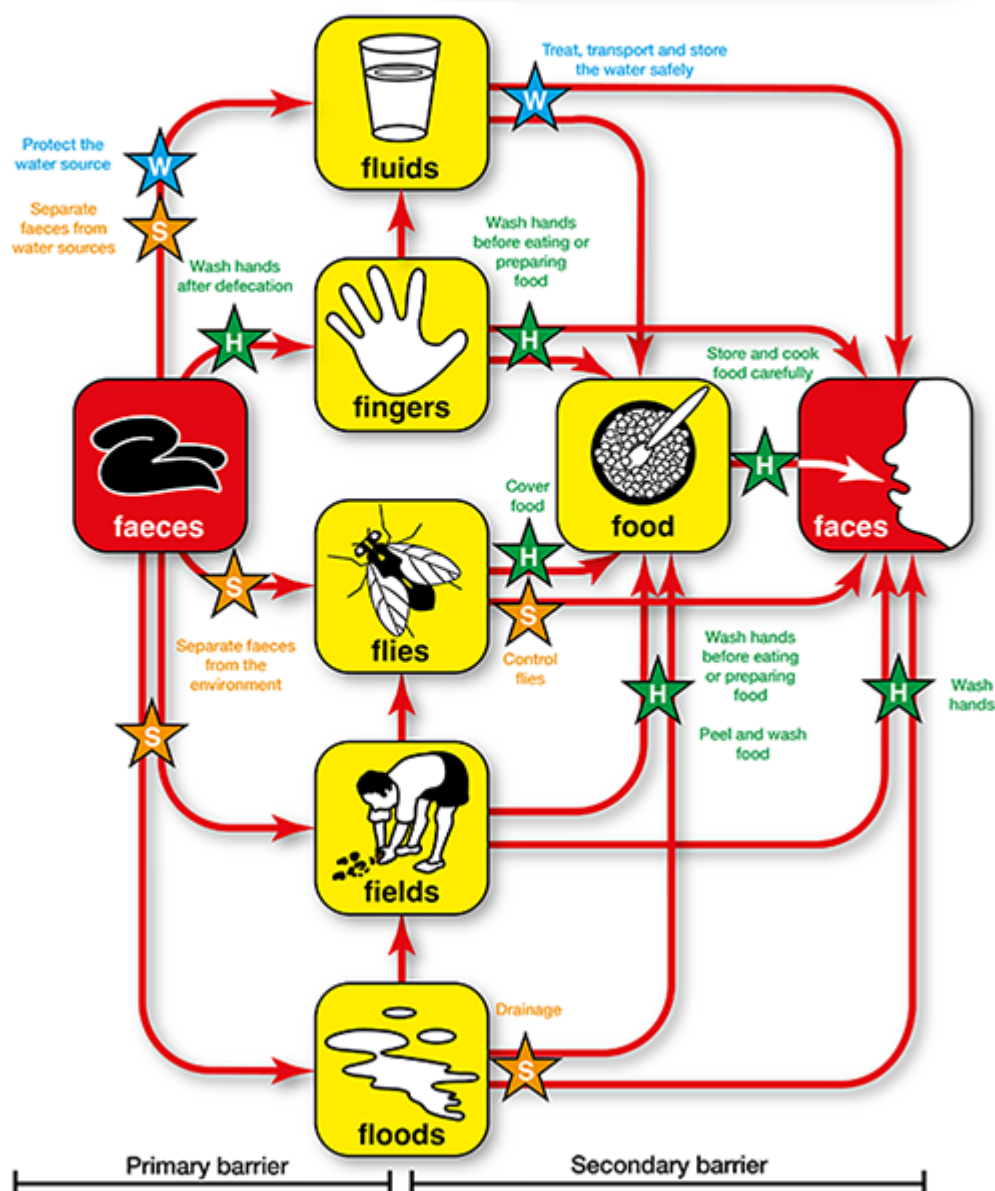
The focus of hygiene promotion is determined based on the health risks. By creating a series of barriers to infection, hygiene behaviour has a critical influence on the transmission of water- and sanitation-related diseases as shown in the 'f' diagram<sup>[1]</sup> below:

# The 'F' Diagram

The movement of pathogens from the **faeces** of a sick person to where they are ingested by somebody else can take many pathways, some direct and some indirect. This diagram illustrates the main pathways. They are easily memorized as they all begin with the letter 'f': **fluids** (drinking water) **food**, **flies**, **fields** (crops and soil), **floods**, **fingers** and **faces** (and surface water generally).

**WATER**  
**SANITATION**  
**HYGIENE**

Barriers can stop the transmission of disease; these can be primary (preventing the initial contact with the faeces) or secondary (preventing it being ingested by a new person). They can be controlled by water, sanitation and hygiene interventions.



**Note:** The diagram is a summary of pathways: other associated routes may be important. Drinking water may be contaminated by a dirty water container, for example, or food may be infected by dirty cooking utensils.

© WEDC

**Source:** McMahon, Glenda; Davey, Kay; Shaw, Rod (2020): P004 The F Diagram. Loughborough University. Poster. <https://doi.org/10.17028/rd.lboro.12738692.v1>

## What do to and how to do it

### *Understand the community*

1. Familiarize yourself with the ways in which people collect water, store food and water, dispose of rubbish, wash themselves and use latrines.
  - Identify key places where hygiene is important not only on an individual, but also on a communal level, such as markets, schools, restaurants or churches. Find out if you can work with them to promote good hygiene practices.
    - You might hold a hygiene session for students or teachers or help the market sellers to build a handwashing station and outside latrine for users.
2. Have a conversation with members of your community about hygiene.
  - Include women, community leaders, caregivers and decision-makers.
    - Make sure they understand that good hygiene is important and can stop the spread of disease.
3. Be a role model for others in your community. Use a clean latrine, dispose of your rubbish, wash your hands often.

### *Promote community hygiene messages*

Normally the key issues to address include the following. Click on the corresponding action cards to obtain the information you need:

- [Food hygiene](#)
  - [Clean and safe household water](#)
  - [Personal and hand hygiene](#)
  - [Environmental sanitation](#)
  - [The control of flies, mosquitoes and other disease vectors](#)
- 

[1] Shaw, R. 2013. *The 'f' diagram - Landscape*. WEDC Graphics: Disease, Water, Engineering and Development Centre (WEDC): Loughborough University, UK.

## Community messages



04. Storing water properly



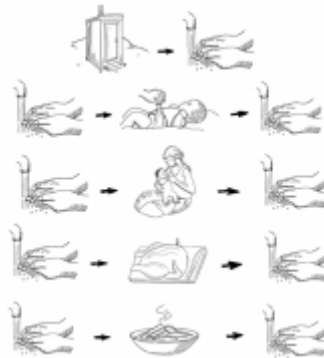
05. Using clean safe drinking water



06. Using a clean latrine



08. Washing hands with soap



09. When to wash hands



11. Cleaning up places where mosquitoes breed



12. Good food hygiene



13. Good personal hygiene



20. Collecting and disposing of rubbish

# 31. Good food hygiene

## Overview

- Food that is not clean, covered and thoroughly cooked can contain germs that cause people to fall sick.
- People in the community may not know or understand how food can be contaminated or how a disease can spread through food. It is important to explain the importance of good food hygiene so that people can protect themselves and their families from becoming sick.

## What to do and how to do it

### ***Promote safe food preparation***

- Food can be contaminated by dirty hands, flies, dirty utensils or contaminated water.
  - Wash hands with treated water and soap before you cook or eat.
  - Use treated water for cooking. Wash vegetables and fruits thoroughly with treated water and soap.
  - Wash utensils (pans, plates, cups, forks, knives, etc.) and clean kitchen surfaces with treated water and soap. Use a rack for drying dishes.
- Food can spread germs and diseases if it is not well cooked or if it is dirty.
  - Cook animal products thoroughly, including meat and eggs, to kill germs.
  - Destroy and throw away any animal meat, offal or skin parts that are visibly affected by infections or parasites e.g., presence of worms, cysts or eggs, tubercles in lungs or liver, infected animal skin etc. Do not wash, cook or eat any of these.
  - Cover cooked food before storing. Reheat before eating.
  - Eat cooked food hot.

### ***Promote safe food storage***

- Food can be contaminated if stored improperly
  - Store uncooked food in containers that are inaccessible to insects and animals
  - Cooked food should always be stored properly, safe from weather changes, and covered to keep out dirt, flies, other insects and animals. Cooked food should not be stored for long periods of time. After cooking, it should be eaten promptly.

### ***Promote food hygiene with food vendors in market and stalls***

- Encourage to use mosquito netting or inverted bowls on plates to avoid contact with flies and insects
- Use chlorinated water to prepare drinks and ice
- Food servers should wash hands with water and soap before they prepare and serve food
- Food should be thoroughly cooked, especially seafood, and not be stored at room temperature for long periods
- Do not put plates and utensils on the ground, but use a clean surface
- Food and meat vendors at abattoirs and slaughterhouses should not sell any animal meat, offal or skin parts that are visibly affected by infections or parasites e.g., presence of worms, cysts or eggs, tubercles in lungs or liver, infected animal skin etc. These should be condemned and destroyed.



## Community messages



04. Storing water properly





08. Washing hands with soap



12. Good food hygiene

## 32. Sanitation

### Overview

- Good sanitation is vital to stop the spread of many epidemics such as diarrhoea and cholera, especially those spread through contact with rubbish or human waste.
- Volunteers can encourage communities to improve sanitation by safe excreta management, conducting safe burials for humans and animals, disposing of household and community rubbish appropriately, using latrines, and removing wastewater and standing water.
- The full involvement of the community from the beginning is necessary to ensure sustainability and good practices in the future.

### What to do and how to do it

#### ***Solid waste management***

- Dispose of solid waste and rubbish safely.
  - Encourage the community to burn or bury rubbish.
  - Promote knowledge about the relationship between rubbish and vectors like rodents or flies with diseases.

#### ***Wastewater management***

- Drain or remove standing water. In refugee or IDP camps it would be necessary to ensure good drainage specially around latrines, showers or places to wash clothes. In other settings as well, keep vigilant also about stagnant water around these kinds of structures. At the same time, observe places or things, like buckets, for example, where people can keep (on purpose or not) stagnant water. Promote hygiene and teach people how to keep themselves safe and clean.
  - Mobilize the community to reduce standing water where mosquitoes are likely to breed.
  - Map and detect with the community the places in the area that are likely to have stagnant water.
  - Promote knowledge around the community about mosquito breeding to avoid diseases like malaria. Ensure the relationship between mosquitos and diseases is known by the community.
  - Promote that around showers, latrines and washing clothes areas gravel or other strategies are used to help with water drainage.

#### ***Sewage management***

- Dispose of excreta (faeces) safely (by constructing latrines).
  - Promote the construction and use of latrines and make sure you have the community support to do so and to help you to find the best place to avoid water source contamination.
  - Discourage open defecation.
  - Ensure latrines are available for all users, women, elderly, children etc.
  - Promote among mothers with babies the safe disposal of their excreta.
  - Ensure the latrines have the minimum standards for protection, inclusion and dignity.
  - Promote female friendly latrines whenever possible. These would include: adequate lighting; latches/locks on doors; soundly built walls and doors to ensure privacy and prevent people/animals going in and out; garbage receptacles for menstrual hygiene products and other disposable waste.

- Ensure appropriate housing and movement for companion and livestock animals such that their faeces and urine are not littering the environment or human habitation.
- Promote hygienic waste management and standard biosecurity measures on livestock farms and avoid dumping of such waste in the environment or in surrounding water bodies.

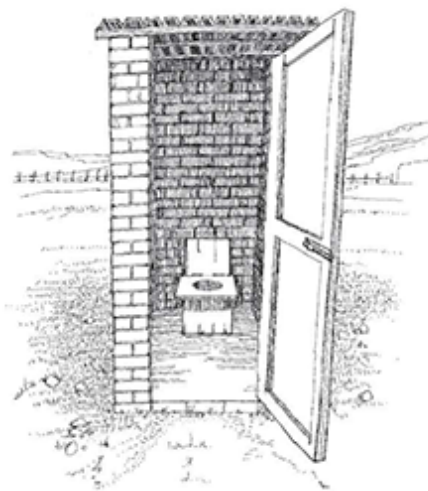
### ***Safe disposal of human and animal tissue***

- Practise safe burial or disposal of tissue:
  - Bury corpses and destroy animal carcasses safely.
  - Control disease vectors and protect people from them.
  - Incinerate medical waste.

**Talk to your community about proper sanitation practices.**



**Dispose of waste safely.**



## Community messages



06. Using a clean latrine



07. Protecting yourself against mosquitoes



08. Washing hands with soap



11. Cleaning up places where mosquitoes breed



23. Encouraging healthy behaviours in a community



27. Keeping rodents out

## 33. Encouraging the use and maintenance of latrines

### Overview

- Many diseases (including diarrhoea, cholera, typhoid and hepatitis E and A) spread to others when faeces contaminate water, hands, food or flies and enter another person's mouth. This form of transmission is called "faecal-oral".
- Using a latrine and disposing of faeces properly can save many lives during an epidemic. When everyone uses latrines, the environment remains clean. It is important to put the faeces of children and babies in the latrine too as their faeces also contains germs.
- In an epidemic, encouraging the community to use and maintain latrines is an important part of preventing the spread of disease.

### What to do and how to do it

#### *Encouraging the use of latrines*

1. Many social and cultural issues may cause people not to use them.
  - Find out what will motivate people to use the latrines and encourage them accordingly.
  - Discuss with the community what challenges they could face to use them and how to make them available for all users (children, elderly, people with disabilities etc.)
2. Many types of latrines, such as pit latrines, can be built easily with local materials. The type of latrine that is built in any given context will depend on:
  - The preferences of the community.
  - How much space the community has.
  - The soil type and how close the water in the ground is to the surface (the water table).
  - The location of water sources (the distance between containment facilities and water sources should be at least 30 metres, and the bottom of pits should be at least 1.5 metres above the groundwater table).
  - The number of people who will use the latrine(s).
  - How often the faeces should be removed. If there is a need for external management, the cost, availability and access should be considered.

Ask an expert in water, sanitation and hygiene or your volunteer supervisor for information on how to build latrines.

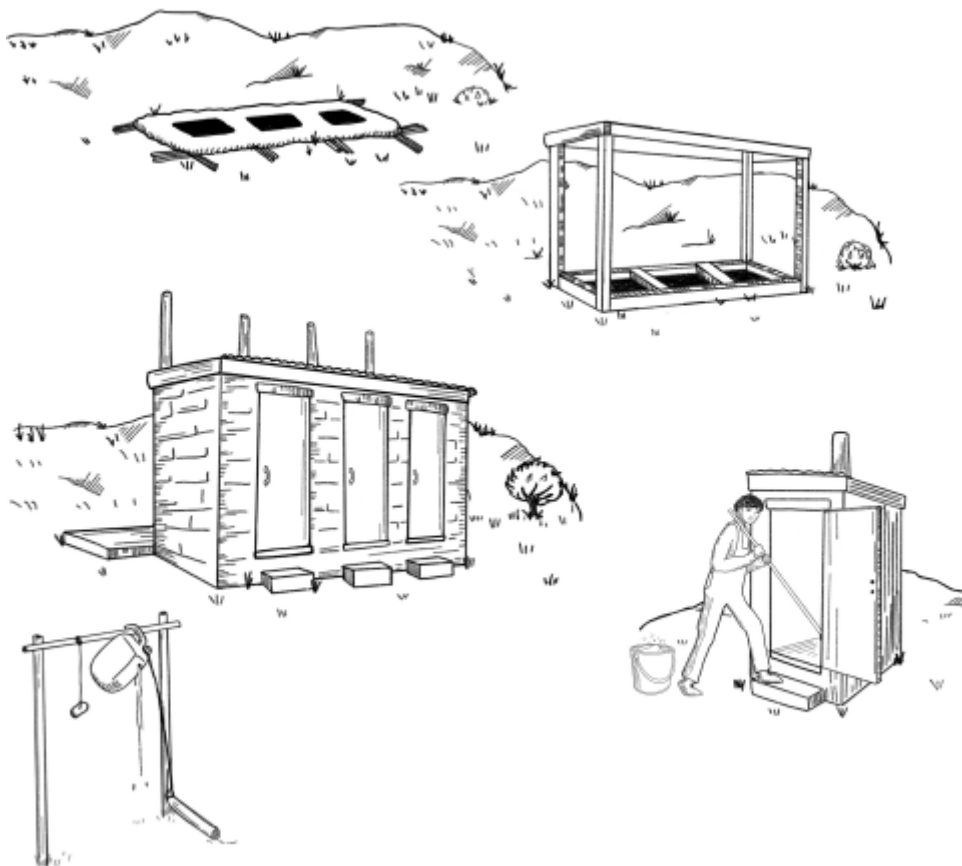
#### *Making latrines safe and useable*

1. Ensure hygiene is possible
  - It is very important to wash hands after going to the toilet to prevent the spread of disease. All latrines should have a place close by to wash hands. It must be in working order and water and soap must be available.
  - Provide locally appropriate anal cleansing material (to wipe or wash after going to the toilet).
  - If using a trench latrine, provide soil to cover the faeces.

2. Ensure latrines are safe to use and accessible to all
  - Make sure women and girls feel safe to use latrines during the day and at night.
    - Males and females should use separate latrines
    - Latrines should be well-lit
    - Users should be able to lock them from the inside
    - They should have hooks or other device to hang clothes so they do not stay on the floor
    - They should have soundly built walls and doors to ensure privacy and prevent people/animals from going in and out
    - They should have a place to dispose menstrual or incontinence materials
    - They should have a handle or ropes to help elderly or people with disabilities
    - They should be adapted to children to stop them falling inside
    - If latrines are elevated, ensure that there is a ramp with an appropriate slope for a person with a disability to access it alone

### ***Ensure latrines are maintained***

1. Make sure that latrines are physically maintained and robust, so they remain safe for use.
2. Latrine pits and tanks fill up and need to be emptied.
  - How quickly this happens depends on how many people use them, how big the pit or tank is, the soil type, and whether people throw rubbish or menstrual pads into the pit
3. When possible, create committees in the community to maintain the latrine, and make sure they have all the materials they need.



## Community messages



06. Using a clean latrine



08. Washing hands with soap



## 34. Handwashing with soap

### Overview

Handwashing is one of the most important ways to prevent the spread of several epidemics, especially diarrhoeal diseases. Handwashing is easy and everyone (including children) can and should do it. To wash hands people must have access to water and soap.

Hands should be washed with soap:

- **BEFORE:**
  - Preparing food
  - Eating
  - Feeding a child
  - Breastfeeding
  - Caring for someone who is ill or treating a wound (yours or someone else's)
- **AFTER:**
  - Using the toilet
    - Men, boys, women and girls should wash their hands after using the toilet
    - Women and girls should engage in menstrual hygiene during their monthly menstrual cycles
      - Promote the use of clean, dry materials (disposable or reusable)
      - Promote changing menstrual materials and bathing as often as needed.
      - Discourage sharing reusable pads with anyone else
  - Cleaning a baby
  - Touching garbage or waste
  - Touching or feeding animals; handling raw meat
  - Blowing nose, coughing or sneezing
  - Treating wounds or caring for sick people
  - Coming into contact with a sick person in an epidemic (see Action Tool *Handwashing in a highly infectious epidemic*)

### What to do and how to do it

#### ***How to wash hands***

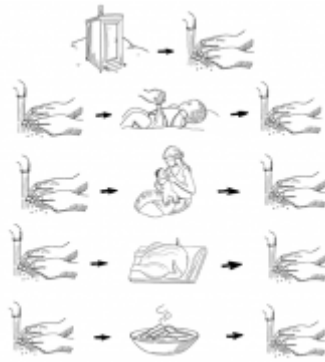
1. Wet your hands and rub them with soap.
2. Rub all parts of your hands together for 10 to 15 seconds.
3. Use lots of force (push your hands together hard) and remember to wash all surfaces, including the backs of the hands and between the fingers.
4. Rinse hands well so they are free of soap.
5. Dry hands with a paper towel. If there is no towel, wave them in the air until they are dry.



## Community messages



08. Washing hands with soap



09. When to wash hands

# 41. Handling and slaughtering animals

## Overview

- Animals can carry and spread germs that cause diseases. These include livestock animals such as cattle, domestic poultry birds, and pigs, companion animals such as dogs and cats, household vectors such as rats, and wild animals such as bats and wild birds.
- All animals can carry germs in their bodies when they are alive and in their meat and offals when they are slaughtered for food. Animal by-products, such as milk or eggs, can also carry germs.
- Animals that have died (including foetuses that have been aborted or animals that died during birth) can also carry germs.
- To avoid spreading diseases, it is important to wear personal protective equipment and follow recommended hygiene practices when dealing with live or dead animals and their by-products.

### Diseases transmitted by animals

Disease	Animals	Transmission
Rift Valley fever	Sheep, cattle. other animals. Signs and symptoms in infected animals: abortion; deaths in young.	Transmitted by mosquito bites; droplets in the air; the blood of sick animals; the bodies of infected dead animals.
Avian influenza	Wild and domestic poultry (birds). Signs and symptoms in infected animals: death or neurological signs; may have no signs of illness.	Transmitted through droplets in the air; feathers; and potentially the eggs and meat of infected birds.
Mpox	Mainly monkeys. Also rats, squirrels and prairie dogs. Signs and symptoms in infected animals: mainly none. Skin sores, breathing problems in prairie dogs.	Transmitted by touching infected animals or their body fluids; the bite or scratch of an infected animal; the meat of infected animals.
Plague	Mainly rats. Also rabbits, squirrels and prairie dogs. Signs and symptoms in infected animals: none in above. May cause disease in cats and occasionally dogs.	Transmitted by flea bites and domestic rats; droplets in the air; the bodies of dead infected animals.
Leptospirosis	Cattle, pigs, rodents (mainly rats). Signs and symptoms in infected animals: abortion; liver and kidney disease. None in rats.	Transmitted by contact (through a cut, eyes, mouth etc.); or ingestion of the urine of an infected animal.

Disease	Animals	Transmission
<b>MERS</b>	Camels. Signs and symptoms in infected animals: none.	Transmitted by close contact with an infected animal or person.
<b>Hantavirus pulmonary syndrome</b>	Rodents (mainly rats). Signs and symptoms in infected animals: none.	Transmitted by droplets of rodent urine or faeces in the air; the bodies of dead infected rodents; a bite or a scratch.
<b>Anthrax</b>	Sheep, cattle (cows) and other animals. Signs and symptoms in infected animals: sudden death in sheep and cattle; neck swelling with breathing difficulties in pigs, dogs and cats.	Transmitted by contact with, or eating, infected animal products; spores in the air.
<b>Rabies</b>	Primarily dogs, but may affect other mammals such as cats, livestock and wildlife; initial signs include fever, pain and unusual or unexplained tingling, pricking, or burning sensations at the wound site, later progressive and fatal neurological signs	Dog bites and scratches cause 99% of the human rabies cases

### ***Handling poultry and livestock***

Poultry (birds)	Sheep and cows
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Be careful when keeping poultry (birds) at home: keep the birds separated from the places where humans live and ensure that where they live is regularly kept clean and safe.</li> <li>• Keep domestic poultry birds away from the reach and contact of wild birds.</li> <li>• Keep the birds in a closed yard or enclosed free-range area where they have plenty of room to roam.</li> <li>• Do not let children play where the birds are kept.</li> <li>• Cook poultry (meat or eggs) thoroughly.</li> <li>• When preparing raw meat or eggs, always use clean utensils (knives, forks) and clean surfaces.</li> <li>• After cooking, use new utensils for eating. Never use the same utensils that you cook with. If no unused utensils are available, wash the utensils thoroughly before they are used for eating.</li> <li>• When slaughtering and handling poultry, be sure to protect yourself. Wear gloves and goggles if possible.</li> <li>• Never touch sick or dead birds without protection.</li> <li>• Observe birds for signs of sickness. If you detect illness, inform the animal health and welfare authorities.</li> <li>• At the slaughterhouse, abattoirs or when slaughtering at home, animals with visibly infected tissue and organ parts (e.g. tubercles, worms, eggs of parasites, etc.) should be immediately condemned and disposed of/destroyed. They should not be consumed or taken to the market for sale.</li> <li>• Wash hands thoroughly with soap and water after any contact with living or dead animals (grooming, feeding, husbandry, etc.), their by-products (eggs, feathers, raw wool, etc.).</li> <li>• Dispose of animal carcasses appropriately and swiftly (by burning or burying).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Keep sheep or cows in an enclosed yard or free range where they have plenty of room to roam.</li> <li>• Do not let children play where animals are kept.</li> <li>• Cook meat thoroughly.</li> <li>• Boil milk before drinking or cooking it.</li> <li>• When preparing raw meat, always use clean utensils (knives, forks) and clean surfaces.</li> <li>• After cooking, use new utensils for eating. Never use the same utensils that you cook with. If no unused utensils are available, wash the utensils thoroughly before they are used for eating.</li> <li>• When handling or slaughtering livestock, be sure to protect yourself. Wear gloves and goggles if possible.</li> <li>• Never touch sick or dead sheep, goat or cows without protection.</li> <li>• Observe animals for signs of sickness. If you detect illness, inform the animal health and welfare authorities.</li> <li>• At the slaughterhouse, abattoirs or when slaughtering at home, animals with visibly infected tissue and organ parts (e.g. tubercles, worms, eggs of parasites, etc) should be immediately condemned and disposed of/destroyed. They should not be consumed or taken to the market for sale.</li> <li>• Wash hands thoroughly with soap and water after any contact with living or dead animals (grooming, feeding, husbandry, etc.), their by-products (eggs, feathers, raw wool, etc.).</li> <li>• Dispose of animal carcasses appropriately and swiftly (by burning or burying).</li> </ul>

### ***Handling bushmeat (monkeys, rodents, wild pigs and others)***

Bushmeat should be discouraged as a food source, especially in areas where epidemic-causing infections are present in bushmeat. However, sometimes people may continue to eat bushmeat and to use bushmeat by-products. In these cases, volunteers should promote the following messages:

- Do not let children play where animal carcasses are kept.
- Cook bushmeat thoroughly.
- When preparing raw meat, always use clean utensils (knives, forks) and clean surfaces.
- After cooking, use new utensils for eating. Never use the same utensils that you cook with.
- When slaughtering, butchering or skinning bushmeat, be sure to protect yourself. Wear gloves and goggles if possible.
- If you come upon an animal in the bush that appears sick or is already dead, do not handle it without

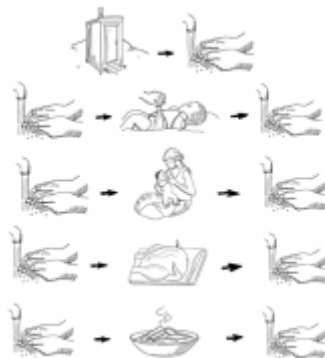
protection (for example, gloves).

- Observe animals for signs of sickness. If you detect illness, inform the authorities.
- Wash hands thoroughly with soap and water after any contact with living or dead animals.
- Dispose of animal carcasses appropriately and swiftly (by burning or burying).

## Community messages



08. Washing hands with soap



09. When to wash hands



25. Handling and slaughtering animals

## 43. Social mobilization and behaviour change

### Overview

There are many reasons why people practise unhealthy behaviours. People are affected by access to services or facilities, social norms and influences where they work, live or play. Behaviour change is the study of how and why people change some habit or action in their life. As volunteers, we need to understand WHY the behaviour is happening and WHAT actions will lead to change to create healthy behaviours. Examples of healthy behaviours include handwashing, breastfeeding, immunizations, consistent condom use and use of bed nets.

In any culture and context, behaviour change involves three elements. Before people will change their behaviour:

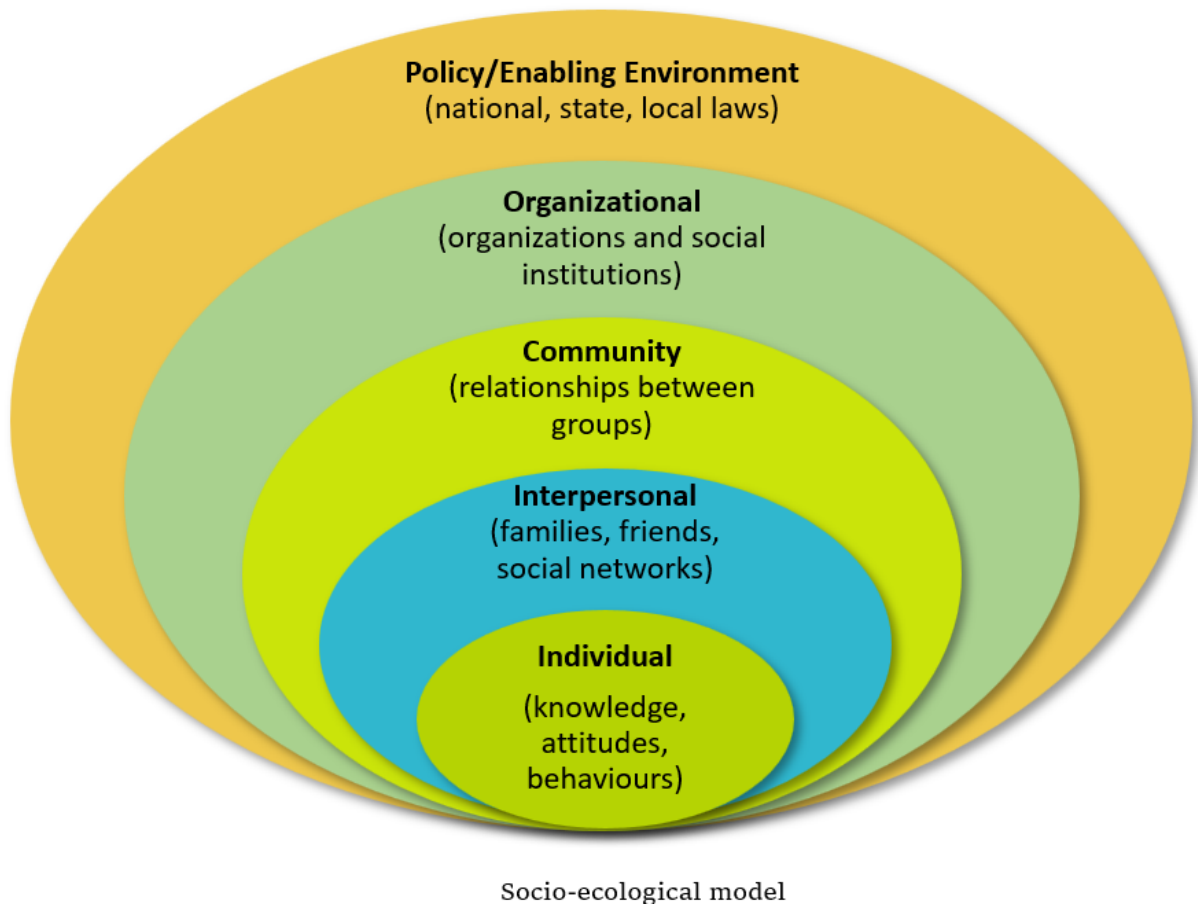
1. They need to know what, why and how they should change. They need knowledge.
2. They need to have the right equipment, access and capacity. They need an enabling environment.
3. They need to be motivated to change.



The social-ecological model below shows how each person's behaviours are affected by many different levels of influence including the individual level, the interpersonal level, the community level, the organizational level and the broader policy level which includes laws and policies that allow or restrict a behaviour. In order to promote health, it is important to consider and plan behaviour change activities across multiple levels at the



same time. This approach is more likely to result in successful behaviour change over time. As a volunteer, it is helpful to understand that behaviour change is difficult for many people because of these many levels and the complex interactions and expectations across the different levels. If you consider how each of the levels affects the behaviour of the person you want to help, you can try different interventions at each level that is specific to their needs.



### What do to and how to do it

The general process for developing a behaviour change intervention includes staff and volunteers working through the general steps of:

1. Sensitizing the community to the behaviour change process using the theory of change model.
2. Assessing the problem behaviour – why it is practised, who practises it, when it is practised and what factors in the environment or society encourage the behaviour. Assess this information at the different levels of the social-ecological model for each community you serve.
3. Identifying an appropriate behaviour goal based on your assessment.
4. Reviewing the causes or barriers at each level that allow the behaviour to continue. Identify interventions that align with each cause or barrier and that can be used at different levels.
5. Discussing the suggested interventions for each social-ecological model level with the community.
6. Identifying appropriate interventions for the context at each level. Interventions should be planned to address the stages of the theory of change by first giving knowledge and addressing environmental factors, motivating key people to gain approval and intentions, and ultimately inciting people to action that contributes to the overall goal.
7. Implementing the interventions at each level.

8. Monitoring to see if change is happening. Change takes time but it must be monitored to ensure that it is happening, even slowly. Additionally, as people go through the change process, their barriers and causes will change. The behaviour change interventions should adjust to these changes to ensure that change can continue.
9. Recognizing that when change is not happening as intended, further assessment and intervention tweaking is needed.
10. Continuing to implement, monitor, assess and adjust as the change process happens.

For more information, please consult the eCBHFA Manual for volunteers on [Behaviour Change](#), including:

1. Principles of behaviour change
2. The social ecological model
3. The stages of behaviour change
4. Activities for behaviour change

## Community messages



23. Encouraging healthy behaviours in a community

## 44. Dealing with rumors

### Overview

- Rumours are stories of uncertain truth. They often spread in communities during epidemics when people feel fear or anxiety about the disease. Rumours often provide an explanation for what is unknown about the disease, even if the explanation is not true.
- Rumours include *misinformation* or *disinformation*. Misinformation is when incorrect information is spread, without the intent to deceive, through a misunderstanding or a mistake. An example of misinformation is the rumour that Ebola is caused by witchcraft. In truth, Ebola is spread by a virus, but people often mistake it for witchcraft because they cannot see the virus or have never heard of the Ebola virus before.
- Disinformation is when incorrect information is spread intentionally to deceive or manipulate, such as “fake news”, which is disinformation disguised as news and is often spread for political or economic gain. An example of disinformation is when someone who sells multivitamins advertises that the tablets “cure” HIV, even though they know it is not true.

In epidemics, we often see two kinds of rumours:

- Rumours about possible cases
  - These rumours can violate community members’ privacy and right to confidentiality and may put them at risk
    - Rumours can often reflect pre-existing fears and prejudices within the community. This may lead to placing blame on different people or groups. This type of untrue belief can give community members “permission” to discriminate against someone or a group without feeling guilty, because of untrue beliefs.
  - They may also cause the unnecessary use/waste of health resources when rumoured cases must be followed up
- Rumours about the causes or treatment of the disease
  - Can distract from public health messaging
  - May conflict with the behaviours and practices recommended to fight the epidemic
  - Can create a dangerous situation for volunteers and healthcare providers if they cause mistrust

Paying attention to rumours can help us to understand the beliefs and perceptions that influence people. Using this information, we can make our messages specific to the community, the context and the beliefs. Rumours may also serve as a warning sign of hazards such as violence or risky behaviours so these can be managed quickly.

### What to do and how to do it

#### *Listen for rumours and capture information*

- Establish a system for listening to rumours: Listening for rumours involves more than just hearing the words people use. To effectively listen to rumours, you need to:
  - Build trust with community members: Identifying rumours is not as simple as asking people about any rumours they have heard. This will not necessarily uncover rumours because people may believe a rumour to be true and therefore not consider it a rumour. Also, people may not trust you as someone to discuss their beliefs with, in this way.
  - Listen to the language the community is most comfortable using

- Tune into social and traditional media to understand what people are hearing and what they are saying
- Engage in open and unstructured conversations with diverse groups of people to understand the beliefs they hold and why they hold them
- Host group discussions with community members and members of community groups (such as women's or youth groups)
- Pay attention to what you hear during your work as a volunteer, but also during your personal time
- Establish a method of collecting information about rumours: Use a rumour log where you can record:
  - Details – what is the rumour?
  - Date - when was the rumour heard?
  - Location - where was the rumour heard?
  - Channel – how is the rumour being shared/spread?

### ***Report and help to verify rumours***

- Report rumours to your supervisor: Ask them to verify if the rumour is true or false
  - Sometimes parts of a rumour are true and other parts are false. It is important to understand the facts
  - Follow the guidance of your supervisor in uncovering more information about the rumour if possible
  - You may be asked to find out more information about the rumour from community members. You may also be asked to speak to the source of the rumour to understand more about what is being said and why
    - Explain that you are verifying a rumour, which may or may not be true, and repeat the rumour that you have heard
    - Ask them what is true/untrue about the rumour you heard and to state in simple terms the facts and how they know them
    - Repeat what you have heard, to check that you have understood them correctly. You should finish with a clear understanding of what they are describing – if you are not sure ask again
    - Try to find out what triggered the rumour. For example, did the rumour start because of a badly worded message? A government announcement? Etc.

### ***Plan a response to rumours***

- With your supervisor, develop a plan to address and prevent rumours. Do not ignore or deny rumours.
  - Rumours usually do not go away on their own and can cause big problems if they are not addressed
  - Replace rumours with accurate information
    - Respect local customs and beliefs and align messages with pre-existing beliefs and customs. For example, a common rumour might be that Ebola is caused by witchcraft; the conventional response is to refer to Ebola as a virus. However, rather than deny this pre-existing belief, it may be more useful to accept that this is what people believe and to create recommendations and messages that align such as: do not touch this person unprotected but feel free to provide food [and prayers] as a token of empathy
    - Use communication channels/people that community members trust
    - Use language that people understand and are comfortable with
    - Continue to engage in conversation with communities to make sure you are being understood