

# Preventing illnesses to avert malnutrition and death



Ministry of Women & Child Development  
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18





# What common illnesses do children in our villages suffer from?



## Tell the participants:

Today we will talk about children's illnesses and how to prevent them.



Encourage the participants to read each question and share their experiences.

Let a discussion happen and list out the common illnesses highlighted by the participants.



# What common illness do children in our villages suffer from?



- What are the prevalent illnesses in our village at this point in time?
- How many children are sick?
- Is there a severely malnourished child in our village who became malnourished due to illness?





# How do illnesses affect our children's health and nutrition?



Display the card and ask the participants to explain the diagram.

Help the participants understand the diagram with the help of text on the right.

Falling sick repeatedly due to common illnesses leads to malnutrition in children and in severe cases, can lead to death. It is a dangerous cycle where one problem leads to another. Let us understand how:

- When a child falls ill with an infection such as diarrhea or fever, she uses up some nutrients in fighting the infection. If she had not fallen ill, these nutrients would have been used by her body to grow, and play and learn.
- Also, when unwell, children, like adults, do not like to eat as they lose their appetite. So, for the duration of the illness, the child does not get sufficient food and nutrition.
- So, as we often notice, a child who is sick for a few days loses weight and starts looking thin and dull.
- Most common illnesses last only a few days, and as the child starts recovering from the illness, he/she regains appetite. Such a child may feel hungry enough to eat even more than she used to eat before she fell ill. This is nature's way of making up for the days when the child ate very little, and for regaining weight and health. If the child is fed well now she would get back being healthy gradually.
- However, if the child is not fed well at that time, or does not recover fully, she remains weak. A weak child is likely to fall sick again easily, because her body would not be able to fight infections well.
- Repeated illnesses like these make the child weaker, and she becomes malnourished. She loses opportunity to gain height and remains stunted.
- If illnesses are severe, she may lose a lot of weight and become very thin and wasted (SAM), and such illnesses may even kill her.





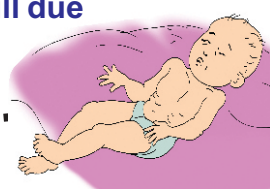
# How do illnesses affect our children's health and nutrition?



The child will feel less hungry during illness and will eat less

The child will get ill due to infection

A child of 6 months can easily catch infections from the surrounding



The child will become weak



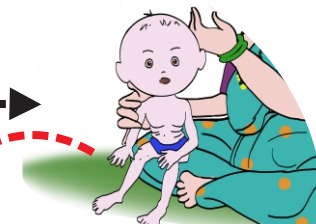
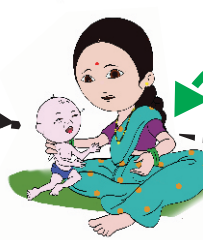
The child will become healthy if she eats more complementary food after illness.



The child will become weaker if she is not fed additional food after illness

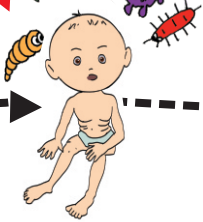
A weak child will easily get sick again

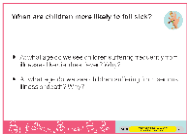
Child will become malnourished and very thin



Malnourished child will get sick again and again

Malnourished child can also die





# When are children more likely to fall sick?

Display the card and ask the participants to read and discuss the questions one by one.



Use the points given on the right side to facilitate the discussion.

Summarize the discussion:



There are two phases in young child's life when she is most likely to suffer from infection:

- **In the first few days after birth:** The baby has just come out of the protection of the womb, and has not yet fully acquired the protection of breast milk. Most infant deaths occur in this period.
- **After about 6 months of age:** Breastfeeding is no longer adequate and the child starts eating other food, starts putting things in the mouth and becomes more social. Most children become malnourished during this period.

Most adults do not fall very sick or die from infections, because their bodies have learnt to fight most of the common germs that cause diseases. Most of this learning occurs in childhood, when they suffer from infections for the first few times.

## 1. First month of life:

The first month of life is the most vulnerable period of life.

- New born babies are very prone to illnesses as their bodies have not yet learnt to fight infection. After spending nine months in the protection of the womb, where there are no germs, the baby suddenly comes out into a world that is not clean.
- If anything is applied to the cord or if these newborns are touched with unclean hands or are kept in unhygienic conditions, chances of infection are highly increased.
- The best protection for babies after birth is the breast milk from their mothers. The mother is an adult whose body has already learnt to fight infections. Breast milk from the mother's body contains ammunition that can fight germs.
- Weak newborns whose birth weights are low, or those who are born prematurely have higher chances of getting infections because their bodies are weaker than healthy newborn babies.
- That is why, of the children who die, majority die in the first month of their life and at the same time weak newborns are also most likely to die.
- That is also why babies, who do not get mother's milk, are most likely to get infections and die.

## 2. After 6 months until 2 years of age

Once exclusive breastfeeding is established in the first few days after birth, the baby remains well-protected from infections for many months. That is why so fewer children fall sick when they are on exclusive breastfeeding.

- As the baby gets closer to six months, she becomes more playful and social. She learns to catch hold of things and put them in her mouth. She turns over on-to her belly and explores the floor. She is eager to make friends and happily plays with one and all. She is no longer in the protection of her mother alone. She starts picking up new germs from different people, from her toys and from the floor, and falls sick with fever or diarrhea.
- By six months of age, breast milk from the mother is no longer enough for her new requirements – she is growing bigger, playing more, and falling sick more often. She needs more food, and if sufficient complementary food is not given to her to make up for the shortfall of breast milk, she will become weak. Once she is weak, any common infection can affect her badly, and she will fall sick more often or stay sick for longer.



# When are children more likely to fall sick?



- At what age do we see children suffering frequently from illnesses like diarrhea, fever? Why?
- At what age do we see children suffering from serious illness or death? Why?





# What are these infections?



Display the card and read each question to the participants.

Answer each question with the help of explanations given on the right.

Draw attention of the participants to the illustration on the front. Explain transmission of microorganisms with the help of the illustration and text on the right.

- There are hundred and thousands of different kinds of germs – small living creatures that our eyes cannot see.
- Many of them live on our skin and in our - nose, mouth, eyes, ears and in our intestines, and protect us in many ways. Our bodies have learnt to be friendly with them, and we depend on these germs for our survival.
- But, there are various kinds of these microorganisms that we have not found a way to live with peacefully, and these are the ones that cause most of the infections that we suffer from. Some cause fevers, others cause diarrhea, or cold and cough. Some cause even more dangerous diseases like tuberculosis, malaria and typhoid.
- Some of these germs get into our bodies through the food and water that we eat or drink, or through the air we breathe. But we get many of them simply from our own hands.
- We use our hands for almost everything we do – working in the fields, working in the kitchen, changing clothes, bathing and cleaning ourselves, cleaning the baby after she has passed stools, wiping sweat, picking our noses, peeling and cutting vegetables and fruits, eating, serving, dipping a cup in water for drinking and shaking hands. At each place, unseen by us, our hands pick up some germs and leave behind some germs. Our hands are indeed the commonest way in which we give out and take in germs.
- Another common way through which we spread germs is using wiping clothes – the small piece of cloth that we use in the kitchen to wipe everything from washed vegetables and rinsed plates to the spilled food near the stove or on the floor. We wash these cloths only occasionally, so imagine how much of germs they accumulate!
- Some of us use our saree pallu in the same way! One can wash hands often during the day, wiping it off a saree pallu undo the goodness of washing hands.



# What are these infections?

- How many kinds of germs are there around us? Are they all harmful to us?
- Where do they come from?







# What are the ways of protecting children from infections?



Display the card.



Ask the participants to identify each illustration and ask how does each of these help reduce the effect of infection?

Let there be a discussion

## How can we minimize these infections?

- **Exclusive BF:** As long as breast milk from the mother is sufficient for the child, it is perfect – untouched by hand and containing substances that help the child fight infections.
- **Avoiding bottle feeding:** Serious illnesses like diarrhea and fever are common in children who are given milk in a bottle with a nipple. This is because even after cleaning with water, small amounts of milk remain in the nipple and deep in the bottle, and germs thrive on milk.
- **Immunization:** Of the many diseases that children can suffer from, we now have vaccines against some of the most dangerous ones, like measles and pertussis. Immunization is done at the health sub-center and at VHSND sites
- **Vitamin A** helps in reducing the severity of infections such as measles and diarrhea in children. It is available at health center or VHSND sites.
- **Food Hygiene:** This includes- using fresh food to feed children, not touching the food with bare hands after cooking, using freshly washed utensils, using water pots having a tap or using a cup with a handle to get water out from a water pot without having to dip hands inside. Remember that cooking of food kills germs and cooked food is always safer than uncooked food. Even cooked food gets spoiled after few hours of cooking, re-heating and consuming this spoiled food can also cause serious illness.
- **Safe Water Source:** The fresh water drawn from hand pumps is safe. But if the bore well is not deep then the water will not be clean. If the source is clean then the tap water will be safe. Open defecation is the main cause of polluting the ground water with dangerous micro organisms. The soil gets polluted with micro organisms through the infected fecal matter of children. These micro organisms through the polluted soil travel down deep inside the ground and pollute the ground water sources. Open defecation should be avoided to keep the water sources clean.
- **Washing hands** often is one of the simplest and the most effective methods to prevent infections among children - after using the toilet, before cooking, before and after feeding the child.



# What are the ways of protecting children from infections?



- Exclusive breastfeeding
- Avoid bottle feeding
- Immunization
- Vitamin A
- Clean, fresh and hot food
- Safe drinking water
- Hand washing







# When should we wash hands?

Ensure at the beginning of session that an appropriate location has been identified for hand washing. Preferably, there should be a source of running water, with sufficient water available along with a bar of soap. If running water is not available, arrange for several buckets of water and tumbler and a bar of soap.



## Tell the participants:

“So far we have discussed how we can reduce the effect of infections and that one of the ways of protection from potential infection is by washing hands. Now we will learn how and when to wash hands.”

Use the points mentioned on the right side to demonstrate the steps of hand washing. Repeat the process twice so that everyone can remember the steps.



Then ask all the participants to wash hands in front of you, one by one. For this purpose, make groups of three. One participant will wash hands, the second will open and close the tap (or pour water from the bucket) and the third will keep time.

One simple way of keeping time is to sing a song that lasts about 20-30 seconds.

Use the text on the right to explain the importance of drying hands in the air instead of using the saree pallu or a hand towel.

At the end, ask the participants to read the points one by one on when the hand should be washed. Discuss why is it so?

## Instructions for Hand – Washing Demonstration:

To reduce the growth of germs on hands, hand washing should be performed using following steps:

- **WET** your hands with clean, running water (warm or cold), turn off the tap and apply soap.
- **LATHER** your hands by rubbing them together with the soap. Be sure to lather the back of your hands, between your fingers, and under your nails.
- **SCRUB**, your hands for at least 20 seconds. Need a timer? Hum a song that lasts for 20-30 seconds, such as national anthem.
- **RINSE** your hands well under clean, running water.
- **DRY** your hands using a clean towel or air dry them.

After washing of hands it is a common practice to wipe hands with saree pallu primarily to dry them faster. This should be avoided as the saree is a potent source of infection and destroys the very purpose of hand washing. Similarly, using a hand towel repeatedly throughout the day is also not a good practice. Instead, dry hands by raising and waving them in the air, pointing upwards.

Pointing the hands downwards immediately after washing will cause dirty water from the upper parts of the arm to run down to the clean hand and fingers and make them dirty again.



# When should we wash hands?



- Before, during and after preparing food.
- Before eating food or before and after feeding the baby
- Before and after caring for someone who is sick.
- Before and after treating a cut or a wound
- After using the toilet.
- After cleaning a child who has defecated.
- After blowing your nose, coughing or sneezing.





# Opportunities to teach hand washing

Display the card and ask the participants what they can see in the images.

There are various opportunities available to AWW to coach the families on importance of hand washing and how to correctly wash hands for protection from germs.

## Ask

- Who all at home should be washing hands?
- What opportunities do we have to help families get habituated to hand washing?

**Home Visit:** During one of the home visits to families, either during pregnancy or after delivery, and when the child is between 6-8 months of age, are the best times, because this is when the family needs this information the most. Encourage the families to keep a soap and water outside the kitchen and bathroom so that they can develop the habit of washing hands regularly.

At the end of discussion emphasize that some of the families will require multiple home visits and follow ups till the time they will get habituated to hand washing.

**Community Meeting/ VHSND:** AWW can celebrate a “Hand washing Day” for the participants during one of the VHSND. Collect information about hand washing practices being followed at their homes. Demonstrate the right method of hand washing and encourage the participants to repeat the procedure. Observe and advise if necessary.



# Opportunities to teach hand washing



**V.H.S.N.D**



**Home Visits**



**Community/ Group meeting**





# Summary



Display the card and summarize all the points.



Ask the participants to read the points one by one, ask if they have understood. Use material from the earlier slides to explain where required.





# Summary



- There are common illnesses like cold, cough, fever, diarrhea and pneumonia that affect our children.
- Frequent episodes of illnesses such as diarrhea and pneumonia can lead to malnutrition in children. With malnutrition, children become prone to severe infections and can also die.
- Infections can be prevented by ensuring immunization, Vitamin A supplementation, clean food and safe drinking water.
- Stopping bottle feed or not feeding by bottle can also prevent infections.
- One of the simplest and easiest ways to prevent infections is by maintaining hygienic conditions around us and by washing hands.

## Please remember:

- When should one wash hands
- How long should one wash hands for
- Not using saree pallu for wiping hands, just air-drying

Utilize all opportunities and platforms to talk about hygiene and hand washing, to people in our catchment area.





# Action Points



Display the card.

Ask the participants to read the points one by one.

Use previous cards to explain anything that is not clear





# Action Points



We are already visiting families every month, from the time of pregnancy till the child completes two years of age.

## During home visit:

- During one of the visits during pregnancy, immediately after delivery or when the child is 6-8 months, we will ask the pregnant woman/mother to demonstrate how she washes her hands.
- Then we will demonstrate the correct technique, and ask the mother and the other family members to practice in front of us. We will help them follow the correct steps.
- Then we will tell them why hand washing is important and when should the mother wash hands every day.
- We will support the family in identifying the right place/s for hand washing in the house - for example, in the kitchen, outside toilet, etc.
- During each visit we will ask mothers whether they are washing hands regularly
- We will use the opportunity of a child's illness to make home visits and re-emphasize hand washing.

**At the VHSND:** Once in three months, and particularly during late summer when there are a lot of incidences of diarrhea, we will hold small group sessions during VHSND to demonstrate hand washing, and make people practice hand washing.

## AtAWC:

- Teach children how to wash hands correctly by making them wash hands before and after eating food.
- Tell them the importance of hygiene and hand washing.



- 1 *Why this Monthly Meeting ?*
- 2 *Making or updating Home Visit Planner & Initiating Home Visits*
- 3 *Planning and Organizing Community Based Events at AWC*
- 4 *Observing Breastfeeding in Newborn Babies - Why and How*
- 5 *Identification and Care of a Weak Newborn baby*
- 6 *Complementary Feeding: Diet Diversity*
- 7 *Preventing Anemia in Women*
- 8 *Assessment of Growth in Children*
- 9 *Ensuring that Complementary Feeding improves over time*
- 10 *Ensuring Exclusive Breastfeeding*
- 11 *Care of the Weak Newborn Baby - How many weak babies are we missing?*
- 12 *How to ensure timely initiation of Complementary Feeding*
- 13 *Identifying and preventing Severe Acute Malnutrition*
- 14 *Feeding During Illness*
- 15 *Supporting mothers with issues in Breastfeeding*
- 16 *How to take care of weak newborn with the help of Kangaroo Mother Care*
- 17 *Identification & Referral of Sick Newborn*
- 18 **Preventing illnesses to avert Malnutrition and Death****
- 19 *Prevention of Anemia in girls and adolescents*
- 20 *Birth Preparedness- For Institutional and Home Delivery*
- 21 *Preparation During Pregnancy: For NewBorn Care & Family Planning*

