Key messages for health education

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

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

How to protect yourself from cholera

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

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

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

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

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

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