

Overview

- Volunteers work in vulnerable situations and with vulnerable people. Working in epidemics can be extremely risky because volunteers can also catch the disease and fall sick.
- Your National Society should provide proper protection for you and other volunteers who are working in epidemics.
- Use the level of protection that is appropriate for the situation you are in.

What you need to know

- In epidemics of Ebola, Marburg fever, Lassa fever, plague, MERS, monkeypox, HPS, full protection should be used whenever you undertake high risk activities. Full protection requires use of personal protection equipment (PPE). (See Action tool 6 for instructions in its use.)
- In other epidemics, you should at least use masks and latex gloves and wash hands with soap after contact with a patient. (See Action tool 34 for instructions in good hand hygiene.)
- You must be trained to use protection equipment, and familiar with it, before you wear it in an actual disease environment. Try the equipment out beforehand and learn how to use it properly.
- Volunteers should learn additional prevention measures for use in epidemics (and before them). These include: vector control measures (see Action tool 36), safe handling of animals (Action tool 41), handling of dead bodies (Action tool 21), chemoprophylaxis (Action tool 23), and good food hygiene (Action tool 31).
- Volunteers should be vaccinated (see Action tool 24).

Protecting volunteers from harm and liability to others

Volunteers often work in vulnerable situations and with vulnerable people. They should be protected if they suffer damage or injury in the course of their work. Accidents can happen, and volunteers can be injured or even killed. Equally, volunteers can harm other people and their property, especially if they have not been properly trained or given the correct equipment.

National Societies therefore need to have appropriate insurance policies. Insurance may be needed to pay compensation to volunteers or their families if they are injured or killed; to pay compensation to others if they suffer harm as a result of volunteer actions; and to cover legal costs. The nature of the cover will depend on the legal system in your country.

National Societies should also supply volunteers with necessary health checks, advice, vaccinations and protection equipment. What this includes will depend on the context in which you are working and the health policies for staff and volunteers of your National Society.

Volunteers should be informed of and understand the National Society's security policy and follow the rules and regulations it sets out. You should also be informed of any changes in the policy and asked to report any incidents of concern.

Safety in the community depends on the personal attributes of volunteers, trainers and other team members – how they work together and how they work with people in the community. Volunteers should be culturally sensitive. Your personal behaviour should never cause offence. You should show integrity and should never become a problem for the community. Correct, polite, impartial behaviour is expected at all times.

