

What is zinc?

- Zinc is a mineral that is important for children's healthy growth and development.
- Foods such as meat, fish, dairy products, beans and nuts contain zinc.

Why is zinc supplementation important?

- Sometimes children do not have enough zinc, and as a result they may have longer, more severe bouts of diarrhoea, and may become very sick.
- If children between six months and 15 years of age who have diarrhoea are given extra zinc together with ORS, they are less likely to get very sick and will recover faster.

When to give zinc supplements

- During an outbreak of diarrhoeal disease (including cholera), **all children between six months and 15 years of age with diarrhoea** should be given a zinc supplement together with oral rehydration solution (ORS) (please see Action Tool 10).

How to give zinc supplements

- Zinc sachets should be distributed or given together with ORS. The zinc sachet powder is mixed with water and given as a drink.
- Social mobilization and behaviour change communication are important supporting activities. Make sure that caregivers of children are preparing and using zinc supplements correctly. Demonstrate their use whenever zinc and ORS sachets are distributed and follow up to check that people are diluting the sachets correctly.

Important points:

- Treating children between six months and 15 years of age with zinc and ORS helps them to recover faster from diarrhoea.
- Use treated or boiled water to make both zinc and ORS solutions.
- Make sure that the cups and utensils used to make the solution are clean, and that water containers are clean and covered.
- Hands should be washed with soap before making zinc or ORS solution.
- Promote continued breastfeeding when an infant is sick with diarrhoea.
- After babies reach six months of age, encourage mothers to continue breastfeeding, while giving other appropriate foods.

Work together with the WASH team, including hygiene promotion volunteers. They can help to supply safe water and support social mobilization and behaviour change activities.

What you can do

- Make sure you know your National Society's policy on when volunteers can give zinc to children; follow it.
- Make sure you understand the correct way to prepare and use zinc supplements.
- Make sure a good plan is made for zinc supplementation, and that you understand the plan.
- Carry out social mobilization and behaviour change communication activities in an epidemic of diarrhoeal disease. (See Important points above and Action tool 43)
- Make sure all children from the ages of six months to 15 years with diarrhoea are given zinc correctly, together with ORS. (See Action tool 10)
- Demonstrate how to correctly prepare and give zinc supplements. Conduct follow-up visits to make sure care givers are preparing and using zinc correctly.
- Send anyone you meet who has severe dehydration to the nearest health facility for treatment. (For severe dehydration, see Action tool 7)
- Coordinate with health professionals from your local health facilities.
- Work together with the WASH team and hygiene promotion volunteers.

Community messages

See the following community messages to support zinc supplementation:

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