

Transmission

- Inadequate access to food
- Inadequate care for mothers and children
- Inadequate access to health care or a healthy environment

Symptoms

- Children under five appear very skinny, the chest bones are visible.
- Skin around the buttocks is loose (“baggy pants”).
- Hair changes colour and coarseness.
- Measuring upper arm circumference (MUAC) test shows red or yellow.
- Evidence of bilateral oedema (water is retained in both legs).

Prevention

- Adopt recommended care practices, including a varied supply of food
- Provide access to safe water and sanitation (WASH)
- Handwashing
- Give routine vaccinations
- Exclusive breastfeeding
- Provide a clean environment
- Ensure the mother has access to antenatal and postnatal care
- Provide swift access to screening and referral
- Improve drought resilience and livelihood programmes
- Employ social mobilization and behaviour change communication

Vulnerable people

- children under five, pregnant and lactating women, elderly and people with chronic illnesses

If an epidemic occurs

- Detect malnourished children under five, pregnant and lactating women, and other vulnerable groups quickly and refer them to health facilities (vulnerable groups include the elderly and people with chronic illnesses such as HIV and TB.)
- Support treatment programmes and follow up defaulters
- Support mass vaccination campaigns
- Increase social mobilization and behaviour change communication
- Promote handwashing with soap
- Introduce active disease surveillance

- Give psychosocial support
- Improve WASH access
- Promote breastfeeding
- Prevent other diseases including malaria, measles and cholera

Community-based assessment - questions

Make a map of the community and mark the information you gather on the map. Record other details.

- How many children look skinny or malnourished?
- How many people are sick with other diseases? When did these sicknesses start?
- When did people start to run out of food or start to become malnourished?
- How many children under five have died in the last month?
- How many people live in the affected community or area? How many children under five years of age live in the area?
- Who and where are the vulnerable people in the community?
- Who is most affected by malnutrition? Who is most affected by a lack of food?
- Is food still available in the market? Do people still have stores of food at home?
- What types of food are available in the market? Have they changed recently?
- What are the community's habits, practices and beliefs about breastfeeding, production of food, malnutrition, etc.?
- What do people believe about vaccination? Are children under five vaccinated?
- Do people cook milk and meat thoroughly before eating them?
- Are there handwashing facilities in the community? Are soap and water always available?
- How many people sleep under a bed net at night? Are the nets hung up and maintained properly? If nets are not used, why not?
- How does the community dispose of rubbish and solid waste?
- Where are the local health facilities and services? (Include traditional and community carers from whom people seek advice.)
- What are the community's habits, practices and beliefs about caring for and feeding sick people?
- Is a social mobilization or health promotion programme in place?
- Which sources of information do people use most?
- Are rumours or is misinformation about malnutrition spreading in the community?

Volunteer actions

See the following action tools for more information on what actions to take against acute malnutrition:

- 1 - Community-based surveillance
- 2 - Community mapping
- 3 - Communicating with the community
- 4 - Referral to health facilities
- 13 - Breastfeeding
- 14 - Infant and young child feeding in emergencies
- 16 - Measuring the height and weight of children
- 17 - Measuring mid upper arm circumference (MUAC)

- 18 - Measuring oedema (water retention) in children
- 19 - Psychosocial support (Psychological first aid (PFA))
- 22 - Vitamin A supplementation
- 24 - Routine vaccinations
- 25 - Mass vaccination campaigns
- 29 - Hygiene promotion
- 30 - Clean, safe household water
- 31 - Good food hygiene
- 32 - Sanitation
- 34 - Handwashing with soap
- 37 - Mosquito nets
- 43 - Social mobilization and behaviour change