

4. Assessing the Sick Child

Common illnesses in the young child could include: diarrhoea, cough and cold, and fever. Each of these conditions will be discussed in the following chapters. However, before you begin to learn about each specific illness, you need to know about the danger signs in a child.

Objectives of the session

By the end of the session, the ASHA will learn about:

- How to identify general danger signs among sick children.
- Be able to recognise symptoms of common illnesses.
- Enable prompt referral.

What are danger signs?

Danger signs indicate serious illness. These can occur in many illnesses. Some danger signs may occur without any relationship to the type of illness. For example fever, diarrhoea, pneumonia, meningitis or malaria can all produce lethargy or unconsciousness. These illnesses can also make the child so sick that the child is not able to drink any fluids. These are called **general danger signs**. The presence of even one general danger sign is enough to indicate a severe disease. A danger sign calls for immediate referral. Where signs of common illness like cold and cough, fever, and diarrhoea are present without any of the danger signs, and where there is no doctor, you could provide some home-based care to the child and keep a watch for signs that indicate the need for referral.

What are the questions to be asked when seeing a sick child?

Every child who is seen for an illness should be checked for the presence of the following general danger signs:

- Not able to drink or breastfeed
- Vomits everything
- Has convulsions
- Is lethargic or unconscious.

How to assess a sick child for danger signs?

Step 1: ASK: Is the child able to drink or breastfeed?

A child has the sign “not able to drink or breastfeed” if the child is not able to suck or swallow when offered a drink or breast milk. If the mother says that the child is not able to drink or breastfeed, ask her to describe what happens when she offers the child something to drink. For

