WHAT IS DIARRHEA?

Almost everyone gets diarrhea some time or other. That's why many people think that it's just something that happens, and that there's nothing much you can do about it. They're wrong.

Diarrheal diseases can be deadly. Thousands of people die every day as a result of diarrheal diseases. The weakest members of the family — the very young, the very old, and those who are already sick — are at greatest risk.

Diarrhea is most common where there is no clean drinking water, and where there is poor hygiene and inadequate sanitation. That's why poor communities suffer most with diarrhea. It is more than a disease, it is a community problem. And it can be prevented.

PARTICIPATION

Before showing the film:

Ask the audience...

- If they know what diarrhea is.
- Do they have other names for it?
- Do they believe that it is serious enough to require a visit to the hospital or is it just a nuisance?

After showing the film:

Ask the audience...

- Do many people in this community suffer from diarrhea? (See what the community's *perception* of the scale of the problem is.)
- How many in the audience have a family member or know someone who is or has recently been sick with diarrhea? What age groups get it most? How often?
- Did they learn anything about what diarrhea is from watching the film? (Try to get several people to answer instead of having one person list them all.)

Discussion

- Why do many people think diarrhea is not a serious problem?
- Does the audience believe that diarrhea is a serious health problem in their community?
  (Do not immediately correct misconceptions as this may inhibit in-depth discussion.)

WHY PEOPLE GET DIARRHEA

Diarrhea doesn't just happen. It is caused by drinking water or eating food that has been contaminated by human or animal feces.

Water is the most common carrier of the disease. An uncovered well, a stream or a pond can easily become contaminated. Boiling water vigorously for at least 10 minutes will make it safe to drink, but this is often inconvenient and expensive. What is really needed is a clean drinking water supply. More than half the people in the world still don't have access to clean water from protected sources.

However, clean water alone is not enough. People, animals, even insects, if they have been in contact with feces, can carry the disease to food that people eat. Food too must be protected by proper storage.

PARTICIPATION

Before showing the film:

Ask the audience...

- What do they think causes diarrhea?
- Do they believe it can be prevented?

After showing the film:

Ask the audience...

- To list the causes of diarrhea given in the film. (Try to get several people to answer instead of having one person list them all.)
- Are some of these causes (e.g., contaminated water supply, no latrines) to be found in this community?
- If yes, why do these problems exist (e.g., poverty, lack of awareness, apathy)?
- What can be done to protect drinking water and food from contamination? (See modules 10 to 13.)
- Is there a time of year when diarrhea is most prevelant in the community? Why do they think this is so?

WHY DIARRHEA IS DANGEROUS

Acute diarrhea can kill. Repeated attacks of diarrhea cause malnutrition, weakening the victim so that he or she is susceptible to other diseases.

People who are sick with diarrhea quickly lose a lot of fluid from their bodies. They become weak and feverish. If they don't eat and drink they become weaker. Without treatment they may die. Unless proper precautions are taken, other members of the family may also become sick.

All this could be prevented. Clean water, proper hygiene, and sanitary measures can do much to control the spread of diarrheal diseases.

PARTICIPATION

Before showing the film:

Ask the audience...

- Do they believe diarrhea is a dangerous disease? Do they go to the hospital or just treat it at home?
- Can diarrhea be prevented?
- If yes, what can they do to prevent it?

After showing the film:

Ask the audience...

- To give some of the reasons why diarrhea is dangerous. (Try to get several people to answer instead of having one person list them all.)
- How many in the audience have a family member or know someone who died as a result of diarrhea?

Discussion

- Are there ways to make more people aware of the dangers of diarrhea?
- What benefits to the community would result from this awareness?

WHEN TO GET HELP

How can you tell when a child or adult is dehydrated? Early signs may be:

dry mouth
sunken, tearless eyes
sunken soft spot on a baby's head
loss of elasticity in skin
little or no urine or urine dark in colour.

The patient needs medical attention immediately and should be taken to the nearest clinic or health centre if the health worker cannot come to the home. Continue trying to make the patient drink as much as possible, even while waiting at the health centre.

Act quickly. A small child suffering from dehydration is in great danger and must have immediate attention.

The later, more dangerous signs may be slow, deep breathing and convulsions. These are signs of a very dangerous situation and mean that the person could soon die.

PARTICIPATION

Before showing the film:

Ask the audience...

- Is it necessary to have a health worker treat a child who is suffering from diarrhea?
- Is there a health centre, clinic or hospital nearby?

After showing the film:

Ask the audience...

- How do children look when they have diarrhea? (Try to get several people to answer instead of having one person list all the symptoms.)
- If there is no local health facility, where is the nearest centre for emergency treatment? How long does it take to get there?
- What should be done for the patient while waiting for medical help?

Discussion

- Does the community need better health services?
- If yes, what can be done to improve the situation? (e.g. community health worker program)

A SIMPLE TREATMENT THAT WORKS

Dehydration from diarrhea can usually be prevented if the patient is given plenty of liquids or Oral Rehydration Solution (ORS) from the first signs. ORS is easy to make, costs very little, and will help the patient recover. It may be available from the local health centre, clinic, or hospital. If not, use this recipe (or the locally equivalent measures):

1 litre (35 oz.) of *clean* water
¼ teaspoon of salt
2 tablepoons of sugar or honey
¼ teaspoon of baking soda (if there's no soda, use salt)

Mix until all ingredients are fully dissolved. Make the patient sip this drink every 5 minutes, even if he or she vomits, until he or she recovers and is eating and drinking normally. A small child may need at least one litre of this drink every day. An adult may need 3 or more litres every day.

If the child is not weaned, breastfeed often, and give sips of the rehydration drink every 5 or 10 minutes, even if the child vomits.

PARTICIPATION

Before showing the film:

Ask the audience...

- If they know of any "medicines" for diarrhea. Do they presently use any drugs? (Discuss the possible problems associated with the use of drugs not prescribed by a doctor or authorized by a health care worker.)
- What are the community's traditional treatments for diarrhea?

After showing the film:

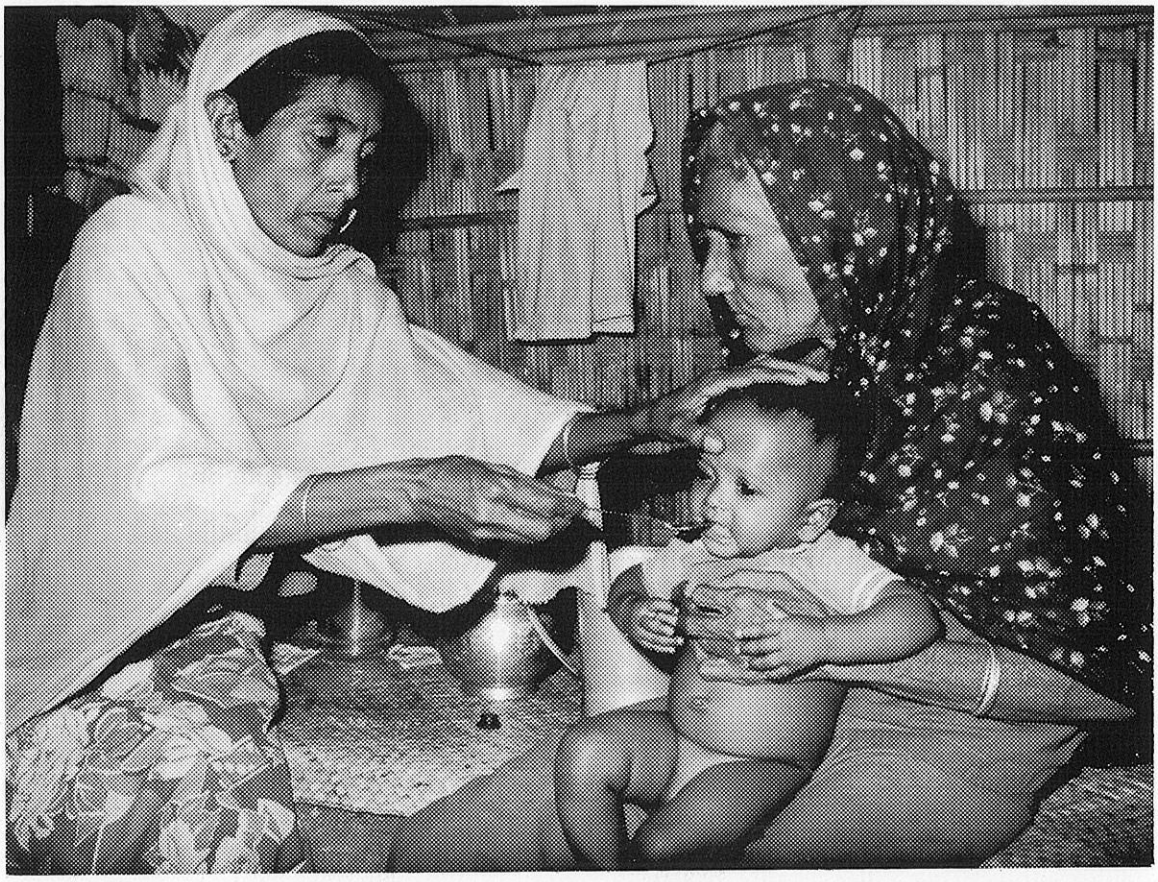
Ask the audience...

- If they have heard of ORS treatment before.
- Has anyone used it? With what results?
- How many will try the ORS treatment if it becomes necessary?
- Do they think it will be easy to make or must they receive more instruction in measuring the correct ingredients?
- Are there common containers which can be used as measuring devices? (spoons, empty bottles, etc.)

Discussion

- Understanding the difference between treatment and cure.
- How to tell when the patient is really getting better and when to stop the treatment.

THE IMPORTANCE OF EATING AND DRINKING



Never ignore diarrhea. During an attack of diarrhea the body loses fluid continuously. This can lead to dehydration, causing fever, and, if nothing is done, eventual death. Small children become dehydrated very quickly. Make sure the patient drinks lots of fluid.

The best treatment is to replace the lost fluid with a drink called Oral Rehydration Solution (ORS). If this is not available from the local clinic or pharmacy, make the patient drink as much clean water as possible until the solution can be obtained. Coconut water is also good.

The patient should be encouraged to eat as soon as he or she begins to feel better. Even a simple broth is better than nothing. Give energy-rich foods as soon as the appetite returns. (Seek the advice of local health authorities for the best locally available foods.)

Remember: Begin treatment immediately
Make the patient drink to replace lost fluid
Encourage the patient to eat.

PARTICIPATION

Before showing the film:

Ask the audience...

- Do they believe special treatment is needed for someone suffering from diarrhea?
- How many have treated people suffering from diarrhea? What did they do? Did they recover?

After showing the film:

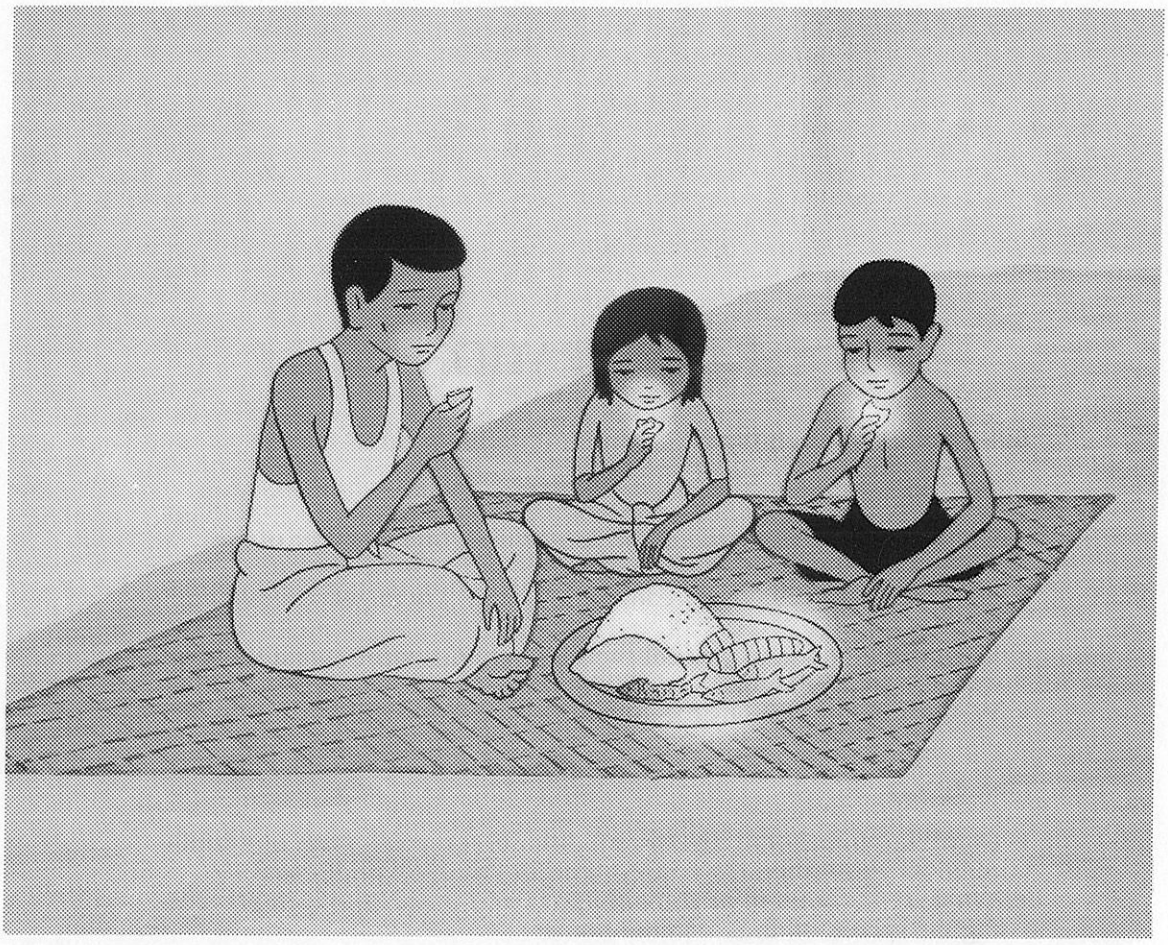
Ask the audience...

- What is the most important thing to do for someone who has diarrhea?
- Why is it important that people drink if they have diarrhea?
- Why is it important that people eat if they have diarrhea?
- What other steps should be taken?

Discussion

- Traditional treatments for diarrhea.
- Misconceptions about diarrhea (e.g., it is inevitable, nothing can be done for the patient).
- When to seek medical help.

PROTECTING OTHERS IN THE HOME



When someone in the family has diarrhea, everyone in the home is at risk. Remember, diarrhea is spread by contact with infected feces. When someone in the home has diarrhea, cleanliness and handwashing are very important.

To prevent the disease from spreading to other family members, follow the basic rules for health and hygiene:

- Keep food and drink covered when not in use.
- Make sure that everyone washes their hands with soap (or ash) and water, especially
  - after defecating
  - after handling a patient with diarrhea
  - before eating or preparing food.

Remove soiled clothing and bedding, wash thoroughly, and dispose of the wash water where it will not contaminate the household or surrounding environment.

PARTICIPATION

Before showing the film:

Ask the audience...

- Do they believe diarrhea can be passed from one member of the family to another?
- How might diarrhea be spread in the home? (Try to get several people to answer.)
- What can be done to prevent the spread of diarrhea? (Again try to involve as many people as possible.)
- Who should be responsible for taking these actions?

Discussion

- Diarrhea can become a persistent disease, spreading from one family member to another. How can you break this cycle of disease?
- What are the roles of parents, children, and grandparents in preventing the spread of disease in the home?

PRACTICE PERSONAL HYGIENE

Hands that have touched feces can spread diarrhea, even if they don't seem to be dirty. Washing with soap and clean water removes the feces so there is less chance of getting or spreading disease.

When soap is not available, ash can be used instead. It works almost as well as soap. Hands should always be washed after defecating, and before preparing food and drink or before eating.

Babies and small children need special attention because they cannot wash themselves. Hands should be washed with soap before and after cleaning a baby or changing a baby's diaper.

PARTICIPATION

Before showing the film:

Ask the audience...

- How is diarrhea spread?
- Who should wash themselves, when?

After showing the film:

Ask the audience...

- Why is washing important?
- Why should you wash in clean water?
- Is soap widely available in the community? If not, why not? (e.g., cost, supply) Can soap be made locally? Can ash be used instead?
- Why do some people not wash? (e.g., limited water supply, lack of awareness)

Discussion

- The importance of teaching the very young about personal hygiene. How can this best be done?
- Local customs and beliefs about personal hygiene.
- What help is available?

BREASTFEEDING

Children under the age of 2 years are the most vulnerable to diarrhea and other diseases. It is very dangerous for babies to have diarrhea. Because their bodies are so small, losing even a small amount of body fluid can be harmful.

One of the best ways to keep babies healthy is to feed them mother's milk as long as possible. It is the best food for babies because it contains the nutrients needed for growth, and also gives them protection from diarrhea and many other infections.

When breastfeeding is not possible, bottle feeding will be necessary. The formula does not offer natural protection from infections, and the water that is used to make the formula and the bottle used to deliver it can be easily contaminated. It is important to know how to prepare the formula correctly, how much to give, and how often. Both mother and baby should always be clean when feeding. If a bottle has to be used, both bottle and nipple should be sterilized by boiling, if possible, beforehand. If the baby doesn't drink all of the formula, the remainder should be thrown away.

PARTICIPATION

Before showing the film:

Ask the audience...

- How many mothers have breastfed their babies? For how long?
- Which is better for the baby, breastfeeding or bottle feeding? (Try to get people to give reasons for their answers.)
- Is it normal for babies in their community to have diarrhea often?

After showing the film:

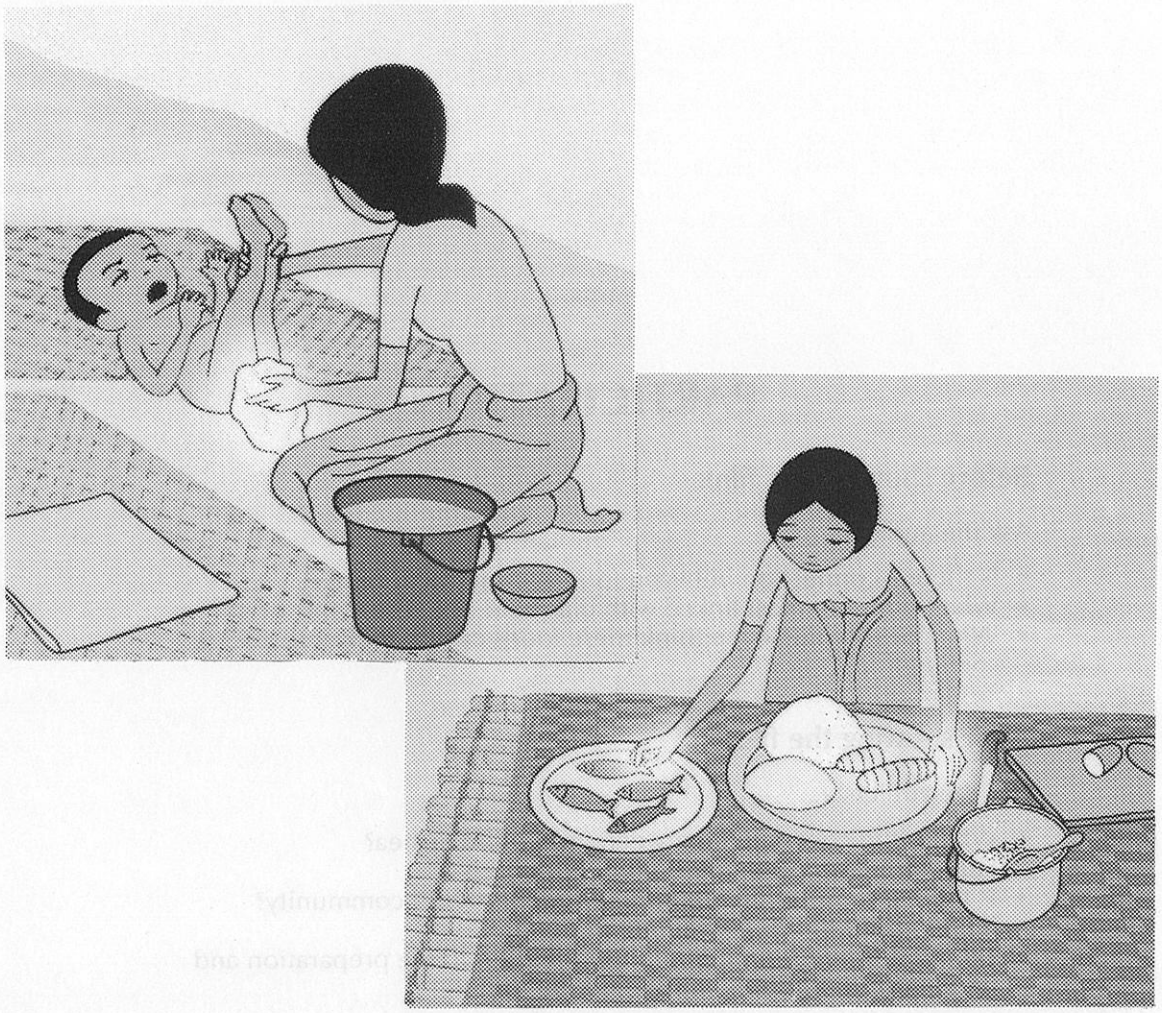
Ask the audience...

- Is it common for babies to have diarrhea in this community?
- Why is diarrhea more dangerous for babies than for adults?
- What are the dangers of bottle feeding?
- How can these dangers be reduced?

Discussion

- Advertising and other pressures to use bottle feeding.
- Other advantages of breastfeeding (e.g., economic, family planning).

KEEP FOOD CLEAN



Diarrhea is usually caused by people consuming food or water that has come into contact with contaminated feces. People, animals, even insects can bring about that contact.

Protecting food in the home is very important. When preparing or eating food, hands and utensils must be clean (washed with soap or ash). If food is prepared with unclean hands, diarrhea can spread to the whole family.

Food and drink should be covered to keep animals and insects away until it is ready to be consumed. Food should be stored in a cool place if possible, not in the hot sun. Prepared food that has been left unprotected for long periods, or that you think may be contaminated in any way, should not be eaten.

The cooking area, cutting boards, spoons, etc., should be kept clean. Dishes and pots should be washed with clean water and soap or ash as soon as possible after they have been used, and stored under cover to prevent accidental contamination.

PARTICIPATION

Before showing the film:

Ask the audience...

- Is there a connection between food and diarrhea?
- What foods are most linked with diarrhea? (e.g., dairy products)
- Why does the audience think these foods can be dangerous? (e.g., spoiling)

After showing the film:

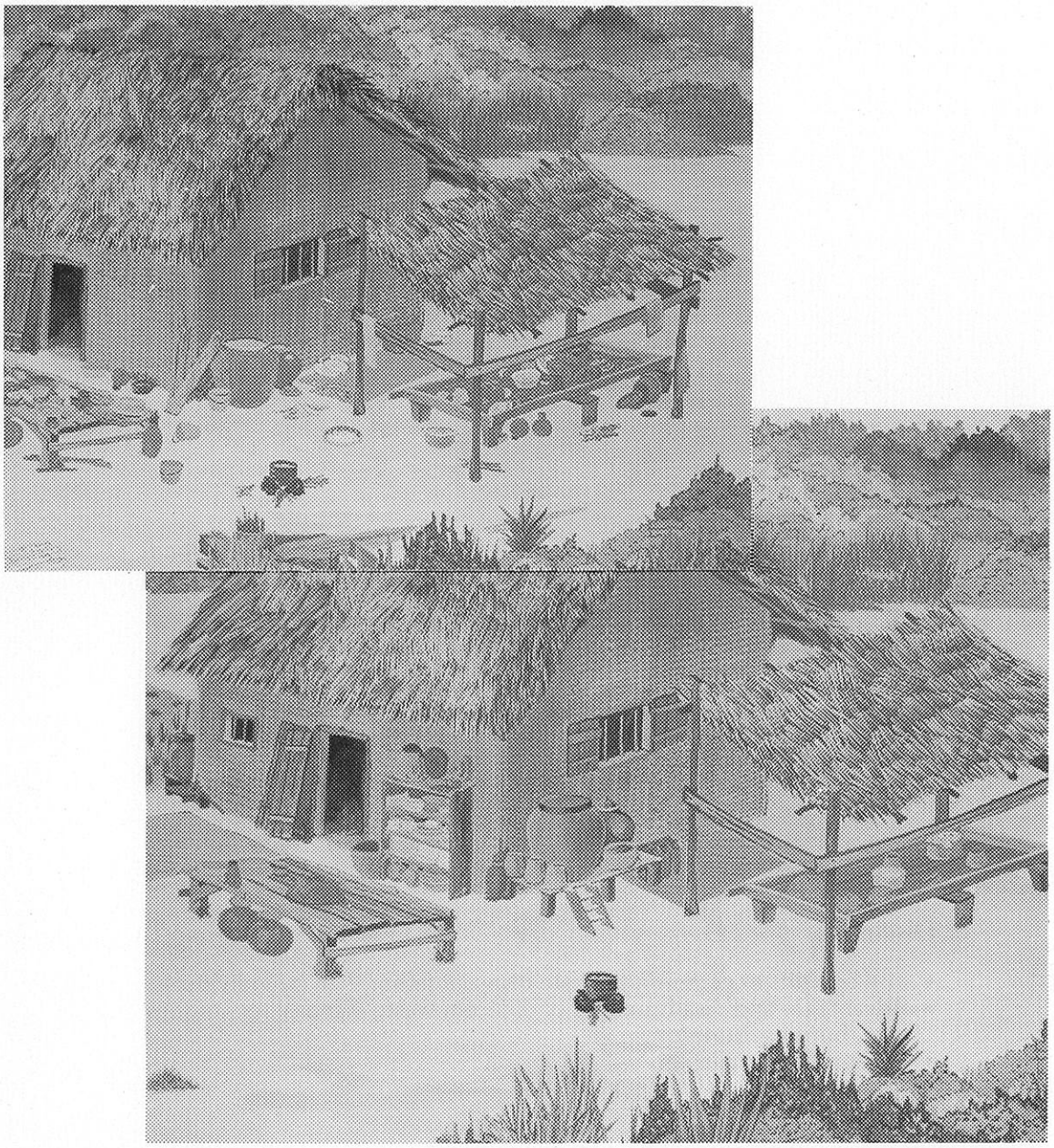
Ask the audience...

- What is the connection between food and diarrhea?
- How do animals or insects spread the disease?
- Is there a problem with insects or rodents in the community?
- If yes, what can be done about it?
- What are the most important hygiene rules in the preparation and handling of food?

Discussion

- Women's role in preventing diarrhea.
- Ways to improve food preparation and storage in the home.
- Possible community action for food storage facilities.

DESTROY HOUSEHOLD WASTES



Diarrheal diseases are often spread by domestic animals, insects, and rodents. These pests multiply in unsanitary surroundings, accumulated rubbish, and garbage in or near the house.

Food waste should be disposed of at once. Scraps can be fed to animals. If not, they should be buried, burned, or properly composted away from the home.

It is important that wastes are disposed of away from people's homes and sources of drinking water. It is everyone's responsibility to help prevent disease by keeping the environment clean.

PARTICIPATION

Before showing the film:

Ask the audience...

- What they mean by "household wastes."
- Is there a community waste disposal site? Is it adequately maintained?
- If not, how do people dispose of household wastes?

After showing the film:

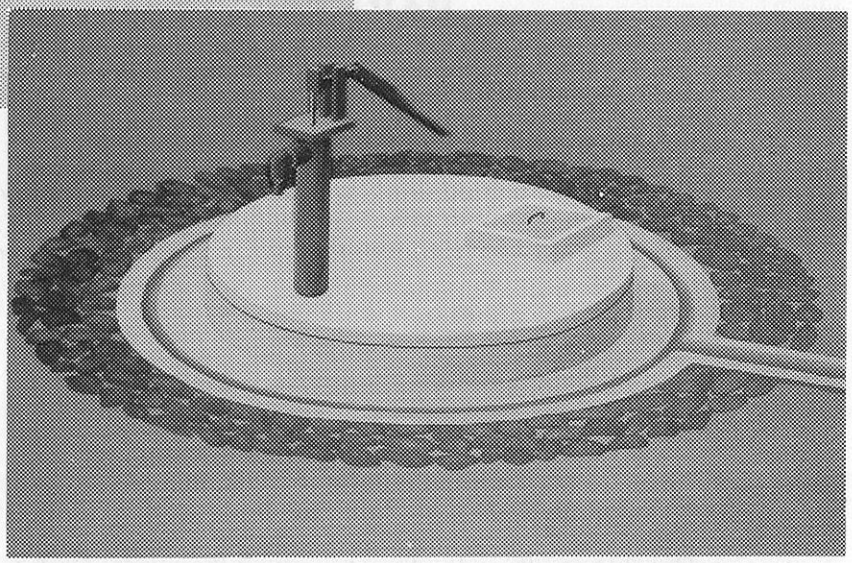
Ask the audience...

- Why is proper waste disposal important? (Ensure that the link to disease is understood.)
- Is there a problem with waste disposal in the community? Does it attract animals, insects, and rodents?
- If yes, what can be done about it?
- Whose responsibility is it?

Discussion

- The benefits of community waste disposal rather than by individuals.
- Advantages and disadvantages of different waste disposal techniques (e.g., burning, burial).
- What help is available?

PROTECT DRINKING WATER



The most common cause of diarrhea is drinking water that has been contaminated by animal or human feces. Water from a safe source, such as a covered well with a hand pump, is less likely to be contaminated. When people drink only clean water, they are less likely to get diarrhea.

If water must be taken from an unprotected source, such as a stream or a pond, or if you suspect it is contaminated, it should be boiled for 10 minutes. This destroys the bacteria that cause diarrhea and makes the water safe to drink. If available, inexpensive chemical disinfectants can be used as well, but care must be taken with their use.

In the home, drinking water should be stored in closed, clean containers. By keeping out animals and insects, or children who may have been in contact with feces, the risk of contamination is minimized.

Even if water looks clean, it does not mean that it is safe to drink. Building latrines downhill and as far away as possible from the water source protects the water from contamination. Water sources, such as wells, must be fenced to keep out animals, and household waste must not be disposed of nearby. Everybody should share the responsibility for keeping their water supply safe.

PARTICIPATION

Before showing the film:

Ask the audience...

- Do they have a good drinking water supply? Does it deliver safe water? Is it well maintained? Who is in charge?
- Whose job is it to fetch water? How far do they have to walk?

After showing the film:

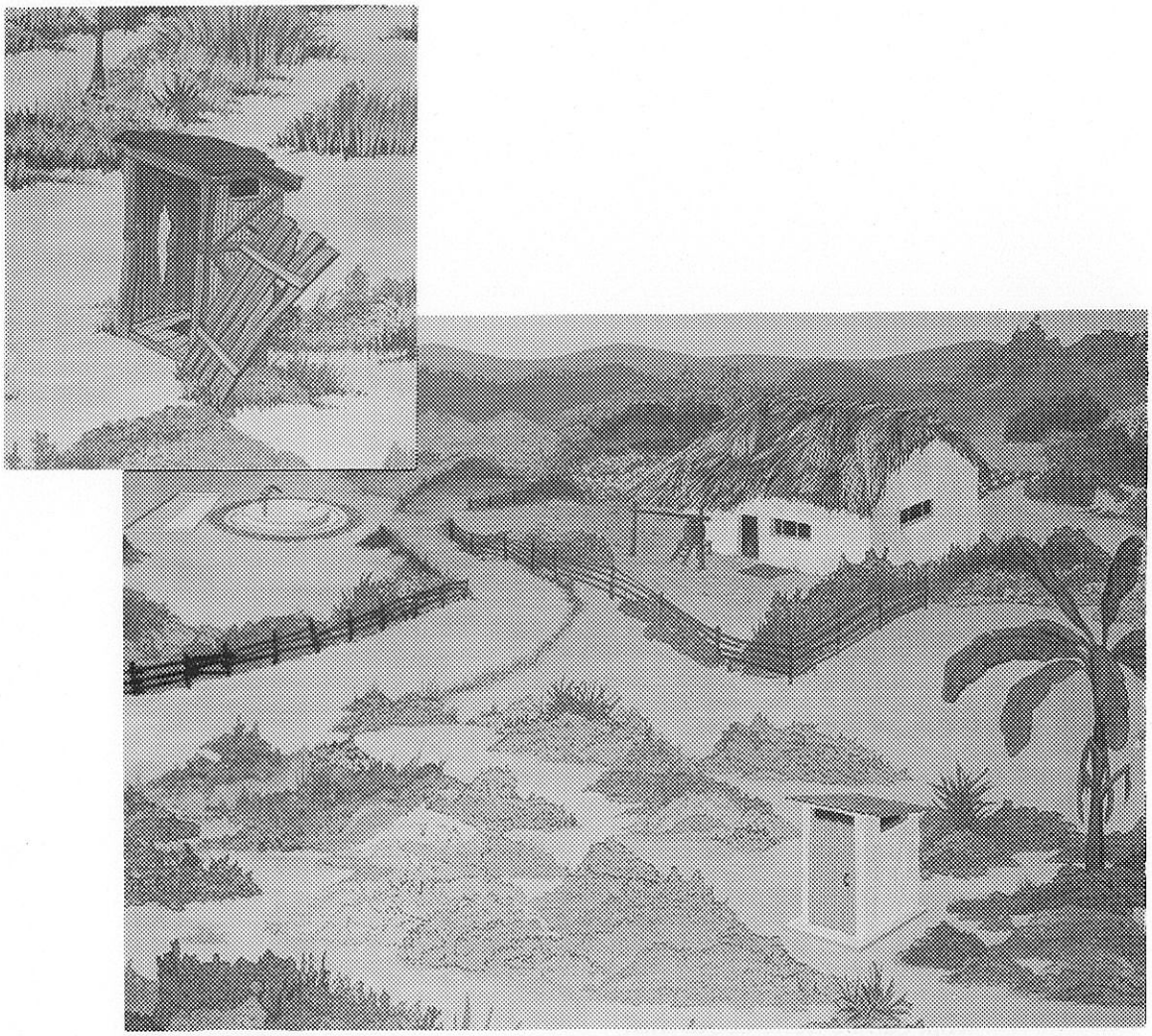
Ask the audience...

- How does a water source become contaminated?
- Do any of these problems exist in the community?
- If yes, do people boil their water? What fuel do they use? What is the cheapest fuel? Are there other methods used to disinfect water in the community?
- Should something be done to protect the water supply?
- If yes, what should be done?
- Who should do it? How?

Discussion

- The advantages and disadvantages of different types of water supply systems.
- Where the water supply should be located, and why.
- Who should pay for and maintain a community water system?
- What help is available?

BUILD AND USE LATRINES



Diarrhea is usually caused by human or animal feces coming into contact with drinking water or food. Diarrhea can be reduced by building and using proper latrines.

It is important that latrines be built in the right place. Never build a latrine close to the water supply — if you do, the water may become contaminated and unsafe to drink.

Latrines must be kept clean or they may become a source of disease themselves. People won't use a dirty latrine.

Everybody should understand the importance of safe disposal of feces. Some people believe it's better to defecate in the fields. They are wrong! Exposed feces can be transferred to water and food by people, insects, or animals and are a source of contamination that can cause diarrhea. The purpose of the latrine is to minimize the contact between feces and humans, animals, and insects. This reduces the chance of transferring contaminated feces to food and water.

PARTICIPATION

Before showing the film:

Ask the audience...

- Where do most people in the community defecate?
- Does the community have latrines? If so, how did they acquire them?
- Do most people use the latrines?
- Who is responsible for sanitation in the community?

After showing the film:

Ask the audience...

- Are latrines important for the community?
- If not, why not? (Is there much diarrhea in the community?)
- Does the community have enough latrines? Are they used by adults? By children? If not, why not?
- Are the latrines properly located? (Ask people to explain the reasons for their answer.)
- Are there other problems with the latrines (e.g., flies, bad smell)? If so, what can be done about this?
- If more or better latrines are needed, who should build them?
- Who maintains the latrines in the community?
- Are there any social or cultural problems related to the use of latrines in the community?

Discussion

- The relationships between water supply, latrines, and diarrheal diseases.
- Local customs and beliefs about sanitation practices.
- Sanitation as a community responsibility.
- What help is available?