

[MUSIC PLAYING]

ANN

LINDSTRAND:

Diarrheal disease is the second leading cause of death in children under five years old and is responsible for killing around 600,000 children every year. Diarrhea can last several days, and most people who die from diarrhea die from severe dehydration and fluid loss. Children who are malnourished and have impaired immunity, as well as people living with HIV, are most at risk of life-threatening diarrhea.

Diarrhea is defined as the passage of three or more loose or liquids stools per day, and rotavirus is the most common cause of severe, watery diarrhea. Diarrheal infection is spread through contaminated food or drinking water, or from person to person as a result of poor hygiene. In low-income countries, children under the years of three experience on average three episodes of diarrhea every year, and each episode deprives the child of the nutrition necessary for growth.

As a result, diarrhea is a major cause of malnutrition, and malnourished children are more likely to fall ill with diarrhea, a vicious circle. Diarrhea treatment is mainly symptomatic and concentrated on rehydrating the child, again, for the water lost. Oral rehydration therapy is seen as one of the most important medical advances in the 20th century. ORS, as it is called, is a mixture of clean water, salt, and sugar, and it costs a few cents per treatment.

Zinc supplementation also reduces the duration of diarrheal episodes by 25% and are associated with a 30% reduction in stool volume. Additionally, it is important with continued feeding, including breastfeeding, during diarrheal episodes, and if ORS is not available, just increase fluids of any kind. Water contaminated with human feces, for example, from sewage, septic tanks, or latrines, is spreading diarrheal disease, so diarrheal disease can also spread from person to person, aggravated by poor personal hygiene.

Food is another major cause of diarrhea when it is prepared and stored in unhygienic conditions. Key measures to prevent diarrhea are therefore to include access to safe drinking water, use of improved sanitation, hand washing with soap, exclusive breastfeeding for the first six months of life, good personal and food hygiene, health education with how infections are spread, and then finally with rotavirus vaccination.