

The Iceberg Idea

This module is designed to help schools to teach the key principles of Facts4Life: that illness is a normal part of human experience, that most of the time our bodies are successful at dealing with illness, and that there are things we can all do to improve our health and our ability to deal with illness.

Slide 1: What is an iceberg?

Ask children if they know what an iceberg is? What have they heard about icebergs?

Explain that when we think of icebergs we might think of the icy masses found near to the North pole, which would be accurate. The majority of an iceberg is beneath the surface with a relatively small amount that shows above the surface (about one tenth).

Slide 2: The 'clinical iceberg'

However, doctors also use icebergs as a model to help explain how a population might experience various health conditions. They call this the 'clinical iceberg'.

Slide 3: Below the surface

Explain that most of the population will experience milder symptoms of any illness and don't require medical help; they will be able to manage their symptoms at home or may not even know that they have anything wrong. They're the ones beneath the surface of the iceberg.

Slide 4: Above the surface

Explain that some people will experience more serious symptoms that do require medical help. Fewer still will become seriously unwell and may even need to go to hospital. These are the ones above the surface with the most serious being at the very tip of the iceberg.

Slide 5: The common cold – below the surface

Ask children to think about the common cold. What are the different symptoms of the common cold? These would include:

- a blocked or runny nose
- a sore throat
- headaches
- muscle aches
- coughs
- sneezing
- a raised temperature
- pressure in your ears and face
- a loss of taste and smell

Ask: what is the best way for the human body to fight the common cold? Generally, these are:

- Rest
- Stay warm
- Drink water to keep hydrated
- Gargle salt water to soothe a sore throat
- Some people take paracetamol or ibuprofen – these don't fight the illness but relieve the symptoms to reduce discomfort

Slide 6: The common cold – above the surface

Ask why someone might need medical treatment if they catch the cold virus?

Although the common cold by itself is unlikely to need medical treatment it may be more serious for people who have other health issues, such as a weakened immune system.

Typically, the common cold doesn't cause serious symptoms so only a very small amount of people would be in the part of the iceberg *above* the surface.

Slide 7: Pushing down the iceberg

There are lots of things that we can do to help 'push' the iceberg lower into the water to avoid the spread of the common cold. Ask if the children have heard of any strategies that would do this. These would include:

- Washing hands often with warm water and soap
- Using tissues to trap germs when you cough or sneeze
- Binning used tissues as quickly as possible (Catch it, bin it, kill it)

Slide 8: Looking at different illnesses/conditions using the iceberg idea

Ask children to consider the conditions shown: allergies, influenza, asthma and chicken pox. They may wish to use the Facts4Life Fact Files to help them with this.

Ask them to consider:

- How do these conditions affect people?
- What are the range of symptoms that different people *below* the surface would show?
- Why would some people be *above* the surface, needing medical treatment?
- What are the different behaviours that would help people to defeat or manage the conditions?

Optional discussion for upper Key Stage 2:

Although some people may have medical needs that create higher risks for their health and wellbeing, their position in the iceberg can still change.

Ask the children to consider a person who has asthma. What other factors may minimise or increase that person's experience of their symptoms? What can they do to help themselves move away from the tip of the iceberg?

NB Sometimes, some people may become very unwell even if there were no known increased risk factors. You may have heard this described as 'no known underlying health issues'. Whilst this does sometimes happen, it is very unusual and is not typical of how the majority of people will experience a virus.

Slide 9: Healthy Lifestyles

Ask the children to look at the behaviours depicted on the slide. What have they heard about how water, physical activity, diet and sleep impact on our health?

Ask whether they think that people who lead healthy lifestyles never get ill? This is obviously not true but people who lead healthy lifestyles are better equipped to cope and manage illness.

You may wish to expand this discussion for children to research some facts about the impact of water, physical activity, diet and sleep on a person's health. There are plenty of resources on the Facts4Life website which would help with this research.

Slide 10: Health Bingo

Most of the time, most people get better from most illnesses on their own. The 'health bingo' game is a useful activity to explore this message.

If children don't need to be socially distanced, then the activity can run as follows:

- Each player has a bingo sheet of 12 illnesses/conditions. Players take turns to ask a partner if he or she has had one of the conditions listed e.g. have you had an operation? If the answer is 'yes' tick it off and continue asking questions until they answer 'no'. At this point, swap roles so that the asker becomes the answerer and continue until the next 'no'. Move on to a new partner and continue until all of the conditions have been ticked off. The winner calls 'bingo!' and the game ends.
- Explain how this game illustrates the range of normality; that there are all sorts of illnesses/conditions that we may or may not have experienced and while some are very common, others are less so. This game could also be used to start a conversation about types of illness, those that are contagious, those that are chance occurrences, those that are linked to genetics or lifestyle etc.

If the children need to be socially distanced then the activity can be adapted so that the statements are read out and the children stand up if they have experienced that illness. You may want to record how many children stand up for each condition which will show the commonality or rareness of those conditions, e.g. all children will stand up for a cold but only one or two may have asthma.

The important point to stress is that although we have experienced a range of illnesses, our bodies have managed to overcome or manage them.

Slide 11: The 'Most' Message

Most of the time, most people get better from most illnesses on their own. This is a key Facts4Life message and a positive one.

Slide 12: Keeping Balanced

You may wish to use the balance ball to illustrate this point and how the body is constantly striving to stay 'in balance'. The video clip briefly explains this metaphor.

If children do not need to be socially distanced you can run the activity as detailed in the Facts4Life teacher's book:

- Explain that the children's hands supporting the ball represent our body working well, in balance. The hands represent internal body processes which work as a team to keep us healthy, e.g. breathing, circulation, temperature control, chemical balance, the bugs in our digestive system. When all the hands are working together, the ball is balanced and we are likely to feel well.
- If one of the hands moves because there is an upset to the system, e.g. an illness, injury, or feeling unhappy, the ball becomes unbalanced for a while. As long as the ball doesn't completely fall to the ground, we can cope. The body works hard to move the hand back and get the ball into a balanced state again. The children could think about how long the unbalanced state might last, e.g. flu might last for about a week and it might take several weeks to get over a chest infection or broken leg.
- Moving around the room represents stress and strain on the body, e.g. being very busy, viral infections, exercising hard. The ball can still be balanced but it takes a bit more effort, e.g. eating particularly healthily or getting more rest. The children might find that they get better at balancing the ball through moving around, and you could link this to how the body can get better at handling stresses.

Slide 13: COVID-19 and the iceberg idea (optional)

Children may question whether the iceberg idea applies to COVID-19. You may wish to discuss this as follows:

- Ask the pupils whether they think this is also true for COVID-19.
- Draw out the fact that the majority of people who test positive for COVID-19 are in the *lower* part of the iceberg. They may have the virus but show no symptoms (we call this being asymptomatic), have mild symptoms or even have severe symptoms but still manage to recover by themselves. However, some people (those *above* the surface) will struggle to recover by themselves and may need treatment in hospital.
- Because COVID-19 is so infectious and potentially very serious, more people have become infected and therefore more people are in hospital with the disease, even though MOST people who catch it do not need medical treatment. This is why we are being encouraged to adopt healthy behaviours that can help to 'push' the iceberg further beneath the surface.
- Ask what behaviours the government have been asking us to adopt since the pandemic began? What other behaviours help us to be healthier and happier?
- What sorts of things have medics identified as causing greater risk for people who may become infected with the virus?