

# Accelerating access to universal health coverage

STAR HEALTH REPORT

More than 1 billion people in the world lack access to basic health care, and another 100 million fall into poverty trying to access it each year. Nearly a third of households in Southeast Asia that includes Bangladesh have to borrow money or sell assets to pay for health care. Study conducted by icddr,b showed that around 6.4 million or four percent people in Bangladesh get poorer every year due to excessive health cost. In Bangladesh, out of the pocket health expenditure is very high about 64 percent.

These statistics indicate an urgent call for action to strengthen our health system so that everywhere, everyone including extreme poor and marginalised have the access to healthcare.

Experts say that it is possible in the form of universal health coverage which is affordable and attainable. Countries as diverse as Brazil, Thailand, Mexico and Ghana are implementing steps toward universal health coverage, reducing the number of families facing catastrophic health care costs. In addition, about 24% of the growth in full income between 2000 and 2011 in low- and



middle-income countries resulted from health improvements.

A new global coalition of more than 500 leading health and development organisations worldwide is urging governments to accelerate reforms that ensure everyone, everywhere, can access quality health services without being forced into poverty. The coalition was launched on

December 12, 2014, on the first-ever Universal Health Coverage Day, to stress the importance of universal access to health services for saving lives, ending extreme poverty, building resilience against the health effects of climate change and ending deadly epidemics such as Ebola.

Despite progress in combating global killers such as HIV/AIDS

and vaccine-preventable diseases such as measles, tetanus and diphtheria, the global gap between those who can access needed health services without fear of financial hardship and those who cannot is widening. Thus, the need for equitable access to quality health care has never been greater, and there is unprecedented demand for

universal health coverage around the world.

The ongoing Ebola outbreak is only the most recent reminder of the desperate need to strengthen health systems for everyone, everywhere. Experts say that investing in strong, equitable health systems is the only way to truly protect and improve lives, particularly in the face of emerging threats like the global rise of non-communicable diseases and increasingly severe natural disasters.

For much of the 20th century, universal health coverage was limited to a few high-income countries, but in the past two decades, a number of lower- and middle-income countries have successfully embraced reforms to make quality health care universally available. Today, the two most populous countries, India and China, are pursuing universal health coverage, and more than 80 countries have asked the World Health Organisation for implementation assistance. Time has come for us – because health for all saves lives, strengthens nations and is achievable and affordable for every country.

## FRUIT FACTS

### Potential benefits of Pomegranate

The vibrant red coloured sweet and tasty fruit Pomegranate locally known as Anar or Bedana is a widely consumed fruit in Bangladesh. This delicious fruit has been very popular from ancient time for its potential beneficial effects on human body and protection against numerous ailments. Different parts of this plant and fruit contain wide variety of chemical constituents and effective against various diseases.



The fruit is moderate in calories, slightly more than that in an apple. It contains no cholesterol or saturated fats. It is a good source of soluble and insoluble dietary fibers which aid in smooth digestion and bowel movements. The fruit is suggested by nutritionists in the diet for weight reduction and cholesterol controlling programs. Regular inclusion of fruits in the diets boosts immunity, improves circulation and offers protection from cancers.

Its juice and the inedible peel is rich in antioxidants, that helps fight free radicals which cause oxidative damage because of both internal and external sources such as exposure to harmful environmental toxins, chemical pollutants and the harsh UV rays of the sun.

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## HEALTH bulletin

### Obesity in children and its consequences



DR MD SHAJEDUR RAHMAN SHAWON

Bangladesh has been experiencing an epidemiological transition from communicable to non-communicable chronic diseases. While childhood under-nutrition is still highly prevalent in the country, there has been a steep rise in childhood obesity and overweight in the last 2 decades leading to double burden of malnutrition.

World Health Organisation (WHO) declared childhood obesity as one of the most serious public health challenges of 21st century as this problem is seriously affecting both the developed and developing countries. There will be 60 million cases of

childhood obesity globally by 2020.

In Bangladesh, childhood obesity affects disproportionately among urban affluent families. Increased purchasing power parity (PPP) makes them able to avail cozy and relaxed lifestyles and thus vulnerable to obesity.

Evidence from recent studies suggests that the prevalence of childhood obesity ranges from 1% to 17.9% depending on the urban-rural settings, age-sex groups. A countrywide survey from 2009 conducted among school children found that obesity and overweight were greater among urban schools (5.6% and 10.6% respectively) compared to rural schools (1.2%

and 8.6% respectively). On the contrary, prevalence of underweight children was much higher in rural schools than in urban schools (19.2% vs. 16.1%).

The emerging epidemic of childhood obesity is mainly attributed to dietary and lifestyle modifications, especially in urban areas. Fast-foods and high caloric beverages, reduced physical activities due to lack of playgrounds in schools and housing societies, widespread use of electronic gadgets by this tech-savvy generation are contributing to this modern epidemic. Parental history of obesity is also a risk factor.

As childhood overweight and obesity tend to follow through adulthood, in longer terms, there is increased risk of developing chronic illnesses e.g. hypertension, diabetes, cancer, heart attack, stroke etc. Obesity in young girls also gives rise to menstrual problems, sub-fertility and hypertension in pregnancy.

School based public health intervention programmes aiming to increase awareness and reduce the risk factors for overweight and obesity among children are crucial to combat this problem. Parental education on diet and physical exercise is also important in this regard. Innovative ideas and intervention research will guide us to take our arms up against future burden of obesity-associated chronic diseases.

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### Health Tips

#### Is your baby in pain? Know warning signs

Babies may not be able to speak, but that does not mean they cannot communicate. Babies often give signals that they are in pain, and parents should pay attention.

The University of Michigan Health System mentions these warning signs that baby may be in pain:

- Crying for an unusually long time, or crying that sounds higher-pitched or more severe than usual. Not crying does not always mean that baby is not in pain, however, as some premature babies may be unable to cry.
- Pay attention to the faces your baby makes: wrinkling the brow, grimacing, opening the mouth, squeezing eyes closed or deep lines around the nose can all indicate pain.
- Babies in pain may become stiff or pull their arms and legs close to them. Babies may also wiggle and squirm when in pain, while others may become very quiet.
- Babies in pain may be uninterested in eating, unable to sleep, unusually fussy or may not be easily calmed with the usual comforting techniques.



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## Knowing for better living

Statistics show that 58% of **Diabetes** and 21% of **Ischemic Heart Disease** are attributable to a BMI\* above 21

\*BMI is calculated by dividing your weight in kilograms by the square of your height in meters (kg/m<sup>2</sup>)

Control your diabetes

Maintain a healthy diet

Control your body weight

Avoid smoking

Exercise regularly

Consult your Doctor



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