

## Gavi to boost access to life-saving human rabies vaccines in over 50 countries

Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance, is providing support for human rabies vaccines for post-exposure prophylaxis (PEP) as part of routine immunisation. Under Gavi's cofinancing policy, eligible countries receive guidance on accessing these vaccines, with the first round of applications due by mid-July 2024. Ninety-five percent of human rabies deaths occur in Africa and Asia, predominantly in marginalised communities lacking access to care.

This initiative aligns with the Zero by 30 campaign, led by United Against Rabies partners including the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO), the World Health Organisation (WHO), and the World Organisation for Animal Health (WOAH).



The campaign aims to eliminate dog-mediated human rabies by 2030.

In over 150 countries where dog rabies is a major public health issue, human rabies vaccine stocks are often limited, especially in marginalised communities. When PEP is available through private facilities, the cost can be financially catastrophic for families.

Rabies is a viral disease causing severe brain inflammation, transmitted in 99 percent of cases by rabid dogs. Once clinical symptoms appear, rabies is nearly 100% fatal. However, prompt PEP, including thorough wound washing and vaccine administration, can prevent infection.

The COVID-19 pandemic delayed the programme's initial inclusion in Gavi's 2021-25 vaccine strategy, but it resumed in mid-2023. All Gavi-eligible countries can apply for funding to procure vaccines and supplies. We will accept applications from July 15 to September 23, 2024, with subsequent windows opening three times a year.

Source: World Health Organisation

## High rates of low back pain plague Dhaka's ride-sharing motorbike drivers

DR MOHAMMAD ALI

Low back pain is becoming a significant issue for Dhaka's ride-sharing motorbike drivers, a new study reveals. These drivers, who navigate the bustling streets of Bangladesh's capital on a daily basis, are increasingly suffering from this painful condition. This not only affects their health, but also threatens their livelihood and overall quality of life.

### Rising concerns

A recent study published in the ELSEVIER conducted between May and August 2023 sheds light on this growing problem. Researchers surveyed 633 ride-sharing motorbike drivers in Dhaka and found that nearly 59% of them experienced low back pain in the past month. This alarmingly high rate is concerning for a profession that is essential to the city's transportation network.

### Who is at risk?

Several factors contribute to the high rates of low back pain among these drivers, according to the study:

1. **Health issues:** Drivers who have high blood pressure are more likely to suffer from low back pain. This suggests that overall health plays a crucial role in the well-being of these drivers.

2. **Motorcycle condition:** Those using older motorbikes face a higher risk. Older bikes may lack the ergonomic features that newer models have, which can lead to

increased physical strain.

3. **Safety gear:** Drivers who do not wear proper riding gear, such as protective jackets and supports, are more likely to experience pain. This highlights the importance of using appropriate equipment while on the road.

4. **Demographics:** Older drivers and those with higher body weights are at greater risk. Additionally, the longer the distance a driver covers each day, the more likely they are to suffer from low back pain.

5. **Workload:** Drivers who worked for multiple ride-sharing companies at the same time reported higher rates of pain. This could be due to longer working hours and the physical demands of juggling multiple jobs.

### What can we do?

You can implement several practical solutions to address this issue:

- **Encourage exercise:** Regular physical activity can strengthen the muscles that support the back. Simple exercises and stretches can make a significant difference.

- **Promote weight management:** Maintaining a healthy weight can reduce the strain on the lower back. These drivers can benefit from educational campaigns and support for healthy living.

- **Update equipment:** Using newer motorbikes designed with ergonomic features can help reduce physical strain. Ride-sharing companies can help by providing incentives for drivers to upgrade their bikes.

- **Safety gear:** Ensuring that



## Severe health impacts of child marriage

STAR HEALTH DESK

Researchers in Liberia and Sierra Leone have found a close link between child marriage and negative reproductive and maternal health outcomes among young women. Researchers found that more than half of women aged 20-24 in these countries married before turning 18, and more than one in ten married before turning 15.

The study published in the PubMed, conducted with data from the 2019-2020 Liberia and 2019 Sierra Leone Demographic and Health Surveys, highlighted several troubling trends. Women who married before 18 were more likely to experience early and high fertility, meaning they had children at a younger age and often had more children. They also had less control over when and how many children they had.

The situation was particularly severe for those married before 15. These young women faced greater challenges in accessing essential healthcare services. In Liberia's North Central region, those married at 15-17 were less likely to have skilled attendants during childbirth or to give birth in a medical facility. Similarly, in Sierra Leone's North Western region, women married before 15 were less likely to have institutional deliveries or receive adequate prenatal care.

These findings underscore the need for targeted interventions to address child marriage and improve health outcomes for young women. By focusing on education and healthcare access, especially in the most affected regions, it is possible to make significant strides towards better futures for these young women.

This study highlights the urgent need for action to support young women ensuring they have the health care and opportunities they deserve.



## Unlocking the health benefits of Vitamin D

STAR HEALTH DESK

In our daily rush, it is simple to overlook the vital role that vitamin D plays in our health. Often called the sunshine vitamin, it is crucial for building and maintaining strong bones. But what happens when you do not get enough of it?

### Understanding vitamin D deficiency:

Simply put, vitamin D deficiency means your body lacks this essential vitamin. There are several reasons this can occur: not enough sunlight exposure, certain medical conditions affecting absorption, or a diet lacking in vitamin D-rich foods. It is more common than you might think, and it can lead to serious health issues if left untreated.

### Why it matters:

Vitamin D is not just about bones; it is a key player in overall health. It helps your body absorb calcium, keeping bones strong and reducing the risk of osteoporosis. Beyond bones, vitamin D supports your immune system, muscles, and even your mood.

### Symptoms and risks:

Recognising a deficiency is not always easy. In children, it might show as bone deformities or muscle weakness. Adults might feel fatigued, experience bone or joint pain, or notice changes in mood. Research has linked long-term deficiency to increased risks of conditions such as heart disease, diabetes, and even certain cancers.

### Causes of deficiency:

Many factors contribute to low vitamin D levels. Limited sun exposure (especially in colder climates or with excessive sunscreen use), darker skin tones

(which absorb less sunlight), or medical conditions affecting nutrient absorption can all play a role. Additionally, diets lacking in vitamin D-rich foods or certain medications can hinder your body's ability to maintain adequate levels.

### Testing and treatment:

Diagnosing a deficiency involves a simple blood test. Treatment typically includes supplements to boost vitamin D levels back to normal. The amount prescribed depends on the severity of the deficiency and individual risk factors.

### Prevention tips:

Preventing deficiency is possible with a few simple steps:

- **Diet:** Incorporate vitamin D-rich foods like fatty fish (salmon, tuna), fortified dairy products, and eggs into your meals.

- **Sun exposure:** Spend 5-30 minutes in the sun each day without sunscreen, if possible, to allow your body to produce vitamin D naturally.

- **Supplements:** If diet and sun are not sufficient, talk to your doctor about supplements tailored to your needs.

**Conclusion**  
Vitamin D deficiency is a serious health concern that affects many, yet it is often preventable and treatable. By understanding its importance and taking proactive steps to ensure adequate levels, you can safeguard your bone health and overall well-being. Remember, a little sunshine and a balanced diet go a long way towards keeping your body strong and healthy.

In a world where health is wealth, ensuring you have enough vitamin D is a smart investment in yourself.



## Long COVID linked to lasting cognitive issues




A recent study published in the Brain found that people who suffer from long-term COVID may experience significant cognitive issues lasting for over a year. The research, conducted during the first wave of the pandemic, compared COVID-19 patients with ongoing symptoms to those who fully recovered.

Out of the 105 patients studied, 83 reported long-term neurological symptoms such as memory loss and difficulty concentrating. Common complaints included severe fatigue (82%), headaches (72%), anxiety (58%), weakness in the limbs (57%), insomnia (57%), and depression (46%).


Key findings showed that nearly half of those with long COVID had noticeable memory problems, including difficulties with both verbal and visual memory. Around 27% of patients showed significant issues with attention, verbal working memory, processing speed, and verbal fluency compared to healthy individuals and recovered COVID-19 patients. Furthermore, 20% of those affected had severe cognitive impairment.

Brain scans revealed that patients with long-term COVID had noticeable changes in their brain structure, particularly in areas linked to memory and attention. These brain changes were more common in patients who had severe initial COVID-19 infections.

The study highlights the serious and lasting impact of long-term COVID on mental functions, underscoring the importance of recognising and addressing these long-term symptoms. This study emphasises the need for ongoing support and treatment for those affected.

## Consult with Expert VASCULAR SURGEON FROM MANCHESTER, UK at UNITED HOSPITAL



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