



## Renal denervation: A global advancement in managing resistant hypertension

In 2023, the approval of two renal denervation (RDN) systems marked a significant step in treating high blood pressure worldwide, particularly for patients whose condition remains uncontrolled despite lifestyle changes and medications. These innovative procedures use catheter-based techniques to reduce nerve activity in the kidneys, employing either ultrasound (Paradise system) or radiofrequency (Simplicity system) ablation, accessed through the femoral artery.

Clinical studies suggest that RDN can lower systolic blood pressure by an average of 5 mmHg, though results vary between individuals. The procedure seems most effective for patients with more severe hypertension at baseline, but predicting individual long-term outcomes remains challenging.

RDN offers hope for those struggling with resistant hypertension, where standard treatments have failed, or for individuals who cannot tolerate multiple medications. However, it is crucial to rule out other causes of high blood pressure before opting for RDN, and it should not be used in cases of significant narrowing of the kidney arteries. More research is needed on its effectiveness for patients with advanced kidney disease.

The risks associated with RDN are low, with serious complications reported in less than 1% of cases. A comprehensive assessment by a multidisciplinary team is recommended to ensure that RDN is the right choice for each patient.

As global access to hypertension care expands, RDN could be a valuable option for managing hard-to-control blood pressure, offering a new path toward reducing the health burden of hypertension worldwide.

# Bangladesh expands life-saving HPV vaccination campaign to protect millions of girls against cervical cancer

## STAR HEALTH REPORT

Cervical cancer remains a significant public health concern in Bangladesh, claiming the lives of approximately 5,000 women each year. Yet, this deadly disease is preventable with the human papillomavirus (HPV) vaccine, which has shown to reduce cervical cancer risk by nearly 90% among vaccinated girls. To address this, the interim government of Bangladesh, in collaboration with international partners, launched the final phase of the HPV vaccination campaign on 24 October 2024, targeting 6.2 million girls aged 10-14 across the country's seven divisions: Barishal, Chattogram, Khulna, Mymensingh, Rajshahi, Sylhet, and Rangpur. This campaign follows a successful initial phase in October 2023, during which over 1.5 million girls in the Dhaka division received the vaccine.

The campaign is supported by Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance, UNICEF, and the World Health Organisation (WHO), which have jointly worked to procure and distribute 6.2 million vaccine doses this year. The initiative is part of a global effort to increase access to the HPV vaccine and to protect girls from cervical cancer. Thabani Maphosa, Chief Country Delivery Officer at Gavi, highlighted the significance of this launch, stating, "Today's launch means millions more girls will be protected against cervical cancer in the years to come."

The final phase of the campaign will run for a month, with vaccination sessions taking place at educational institutions and designated vaccination centres from 8:00 AM to 3:30 PM, excluding weekends and public holidays. The campaign targets girls in grades five to nine and out-of-school girls aged 10-14. To facilitate access, vaccination is free of charge after registration on the "VaxEPI" app or the dedicated website.

Dr. Bardan Jung Rana, WHO Representative to Bangladesh, emphasised the importance of this public health initiative, stating, "The HPV vaccination



campaign led by the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare is a life-saving measure that can significantly reduce the risk of cervical cancer and protect future generations. Our commitment is clear: to ensure that every girl between the ages of 10 and 14 receives her HPV vaccine during the nationwide campaign in October and November 2024."

The campaign's planning and execution include comprehensive measures to reach marginalised groups, such as out-of-school girls, girls in informal and religious schools, and those living on the streets. UNICEF Representative OIC to Bangladesh, Emma Brigham, praised the government's efforts to ensure that no girl is left behind, noting that the campaign aims to overcome barriers that have previously limited vaccine access.

As part of the initiative, WHO and UNICEF are closely collaborating with the government to manage vaccine logistics, including supply chain and cold chain maintenance, real-time supervision, and safety monitoring. Additionally, efforts are being made to engage female educators, particularly in religious and English-medium schools, to encourage vaccine uptake. Healthcare workers will be deployed in communities where vaccine registration and access have been challenging.

The ongoing campaign builds on the momentum of the initial phase in Dhaka, where more than 1.5 million girls were vaccinated with a single HPV vaccine dose. The goal of the current phase is to cover the remaining seven divisions, furthering Bangladesh's commitment to reducing cervical cancer and protecting women's health.

The initiative aligns with Gavi's broader aim of reaching 86 million girls worldwide with the HPV vaccine by the end of 2025. In 2023 alone, Gavi supported the vaccination of over 14 million girls, including the 1.5 million girls in Bangladesh.

Following the conclusion of the current campaign phase, the HPV vaccine will be incorporated into Bangladesh's routine immunisation program. This will include vaccinating girls in grade five and 10-year-old girls who are not enrolled in the formal education system, ensuring sustained protection against cervical cancer for future generations.

By expanding access to the HPV vaccine, Bangladesh is taking a significant step towards safeguarding the health and well-being of its girls and women, thereby contributing to a healthier and cancer-free future for all.

Source: UNICEF

## Unusual symptoms of diabetes you should not ignore

Diabetes, a condition affecting how the body processes sugar, can manifest through subtle yet unusual symptoms that may go unnoticed. Recognising these signs is crucial for early diagnosis and intervention.

**1. Dark skin patches:** Dark, velvety patches, especially on the neck, can indicate high insulin levels and are commonly associated with type 2 diabetes.

**2. Frequent infections:** High blood sugar can weaken the immune system, leading to recurrent infections, such as urinary tract or skin infections.

**3. Blurry vision:** Changes in vision, like blurriness, occur when high blood sugar affects fluid levels in the eyes, causing swelling.

**4. Lightheadedness:** Feeling dizzy may arise from dehydration due to frequent urination, which can be linked to high glucose levels.

**5. Unexpected weight loss:** Sudden weight loss without changes to diet or exercise can occur as the body begins breaking down fat for energy when it can't use insulin properly.

**6. Itchy skin:** Dry, itchy skin may result from nerve damage and poor circulation caused by elevated blood sugar levels.

**7. Fruity-smelling breath:** Sweet-smelling breath may signal diabetic ketoacidosis, a serious condition requiring immediate medical attention.

**8. Pain in limbs:** Nerve damage from diabetes can lead to pain, tingling, or numbness in the legs and feet.

If you experience these symptoms, consult a healthcare professional. Early diagnosis and treatment are essential for managing diabetes effectively.



# Inclusion or fusion!

## TANIA ZARIN KHUSBU

Inclusive education policy seeks to ensure that all children with so-called special needs can study alongside their neurotypical peers in mainstream settings, according to the conventional curricula and academic standards. The strategy aims to promote diversity, empathy, and equality in education, but it may lead to increased stress and anxiety for children with disorders, such as severe autism spectrum disorder.

One could argue with the term 'special needs,' as it implies a separate class of needs that students might have, over and above the class of needs schools automatically cater for. Instead, it might be preferable to use the term 'individual needs,' which emphasises the unique requirements, strengths, and weaknesses of each child, whether they are neurodiverse or not.

Equally, we should perhaps be careful not to judge or put pressure on any child with so-called special needs to follow mainstream educational curricula if they are not ready and to instead encourage them if they have a particular interest in a subject area, like music or mathematics. By encouraging and nurturing their talents in areas where they excel, we can help boost their self-esteem and overall well-being. This approach can also lead to greater success and fulfilment in the long run.

Furthermore, the term 'disability' or 'disorder' implies an imbalance or an inability to perform a task considered 'normal' in our culture. In using terms like 'individual needs,' we can move away from such stigmatising language. This shift in perspective can lead to a more respectful and understanding approach toward all



individuals, regardless of their differences. Perhaps we should challenge our narrow definition of 'normal' rather than the individuals themselves. Embracing diversity and understanding that everyone has unique strengths and challenges can lead to a more inclusive and accepting society.

'Normal is an illusion.' Morticia Addams once said, 'What is normal for the spider is chaos for the fly.'

The goal of inclusion should be to bring together different kinds of learning experiences to help people develop, create, and think in new ways. We need to integrate children from diverse backgrounds into inclusive settings, acknowledging their unique strengths and weaknesses, just like their peers. In the classroom and the

community, each person should propose novel solutions. Rather than including them or preparing them to adapt to our skills or system, the power of inclusion lies in blending and forging new fusions. We create a vibrant tapestry of perspectives and talents by bringing all the colours of the rainbow together to propel our society forward. By embracing diversity and fostering an inclusive environment, we can truly harness the collective potential of all individuals to drive positive change and innovation. This fusion fosters a diverse and supportive community that values each individual for their unique contributions.

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# The role of treatable traits in managing moderate-to-severe asthma

Asthma treatment is evolving beyond the traditional one-size-fits-all approach. The "treatable traits" framework offers a more personalised way to manage asthma by focusing on specific characteristics in patients that can be targeted for treatment. These traits include factors such as physical inactivity, smoking, obesity, anxiety, depression, mucus production, and airway inflammation.

A study in Brazil involving 426 adults with moderate-to-severe asthma found that patients who were physically active, walking at least 7,500 steps daily, had better asthma control and experienced fewer symptoms of



anxiety and depression. This suggests that increasing physical activity may improve overall asthma management.

Interestingly, being sedentary or having obesity did not show a direct link to asthma control.

By addressing these "treatable traits," clinicians can help patients manage their asthma more effectively, tailoring treatments to each individual's unique needs rather than relying solely on standardised medication regimens.

Source: The Journal of Allergy and Clinical Immunology (JACI)



## BENDSTA urges sensible regulations to support harm reduction products

The Bangladesh Electronic Nicotine Delivery System Traders Association (BENDSTA) called for sensible regulations for electronic cigarettes (e-cigs) and other tobacco harm reduction products at a press conference, says a press release.

During the press conference, BENDSTA voiced concerns over the proposed amendments to the Smoking and Tobacco Products Usage (Control) Act, 2005 (amended in 2013). The draft proposal, published for public opinion, includes a provision to completely ban products like e-cigarettes, which the organisation claims could be harmful to public health and the relevant industry. The draft proposal, which was sent out for public opinion in 2022, was sent back to the Cabinet last year (2023) due to a lack of stakeholder input and the need for further review.

Representing major vape importers in Bangladesh, BENDSTA strongly criticised the rushed policy-making process and underscored the critical need for stakeholder dialogue to ensure regulations align with the government's public health objectives and revenue goals.

BENDSTA's president, Schumann Zaman, stated, "We fully support the government's efforts to control smoking and the harmful effects of tobacco. However, there are a lot of misconceptions surrounding vaping. E-cigarettes and vapes should not be placed in the same category as traditional cigarettes. These products do not contain tar, the most harmful substance created by combustion in cigarettes, making them significantly less harmful."

Zaman also addressed misconceptions surrounding vaping. "There is a growing body of international evidence supporting vaping as a safer alternative to smoking,

The UK Health Security Agency has certified that vaping is 95% less harmful than smoking, and countries such as the UK, USA, Canada, New Zealand, and Sweden are encouraging its use as part of their public health policies. Sweden, for example, has achieved a smoking prevalence under 5%, largely due to policies that support tobacco harm reduction products like e-cigarettes."

Zaman added, "Banning e-cigarettes is an easy but ineffective solution. Countries like India have banned vaping, but usage remains prevalent through illegal channels. Instead of prohibiting these products, we should focus on sensible regulations that can help reduce traditional smoking and support the government's health objectives."

BENDSTA speakers highlighted the potential economic benefits of regulating, rather than banning, e-cigarettes. The UK government, for instance, earned £310 million from the vaping sector in 2021, providing a valuable revenue stream while supporting public health goals.

In closing, BENDSTA reiterated its call for the government to include the association in stakeholder discussions regarding the regulation of vaping products. "We urge the interim government to engage with us in an evidence-based dialogue to craft policies that align with Bangladesh's public health agenda while promoting harm reduction."

Formed in 2016, BENDSTA is committed to promoting tobacco harm reduction products as a safer alternative to traditional cigarettes. The organisation believes that regulated vaping can significantly contribute to reducing the harm caused by smoking and support the public health goals of Bangladesh.