

Safer walking and cycling crucial for road safety and better health

As the 8th UN Global Road Safety Week takes place from 12 to 18 May, the World Health Organisation (WHO) has introduced a new toolkit aimed at assisting governments in promoting active mobility, with the theme “Make walking and cycling safe”.

Each year, nearly 1.2 million people die on the roads, with more than a quarter of these deaths involving pedestrians or cyclists. Yet, only 0.2% of global roads have dedicated cycle lanes, and many communities still lack basic infrastructure like sidewalks and pedestrian crossings.

“Walking and cycling improve health and make cities more sustainable. But we must make walking and cycling safe,” said Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, WHO Director-General.

Fewer than one-third of countries have national policies to support walking and cycling. WHO’s new toolkit offers practical, evidence-based guidance for governments, urban planners, and civil society, calling for:

- Integrating walking and cycling into national transport, health, and education policies;
- Building safe infrastructure such as sidewalks and protected cycle lanes;
- Enforcing safer speed limits;
- Promoting awareness and safe road use; and
- Using financial incentives to encourage active mobility.

While global pedestrian deaths declined slightly and cyclist deaths plateaued between 2011 and 2021, regional data shows rising risks. Pedestrian deaths increased by 42% in South-East Asia, and cyclist deaths rose by 50% in Europe and 88% in the Western Pacific.

WHO is partnering with over 400 organisations in 100 countries this week to demand safer streets. “We are calling on all sectors to make walking and cycling safe and accessible for everyone,” said Dr Etienne Krug, Director of the WHO Department for the Social Determinants of Health.

Source: World Health Organisation



HAND HYGIENE NOW

Protect patients, protect the planet

STAR HEALTH DESK

World Hand Hygiene Day is observed every year on 5 May. In 2025, the World Health Organisation (WHO) commemorated 17 years of the global “SAVE LIVES: Clean Your Hands” campaign, which underscores the crucial role of hand hygiene in infection prevention and control (IPC). This year’s campaign coincided with growing global momentum for implementing the WHO Global Action Plan and Monitoring Framework on IPC, supported by a new implementation guide. The latest WHO IPC global report highlights the continuing need for countries to strengthen IPC systems to improve patient safety and care quality.

A key milestone in the global IPC plan is to establish hand hygiene compliance monitoring and feedback as a national indicator, at least in all reference hospitals, by 2026.

The WHO Framework for Action 2024–2030 on Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene (WASH), waste, and electricity services further highlights the need for universal, safe access to these essential services as part of

climate-resilient and quality health systems. This includes integrating WASH and waste management into health system planning, financing, implementation, and monitoring, which can be supported through effective IPC practices.

Given these priorities, countries and health care facilities are urged to continue focusing on optimal hand hygiene (using the appropriate technique and the WHO 5 Moments) and appropriate glove use. This effort should be supported by IPC practitioners as part of structured IPC teams and programmes.

Key message 1: Medical gloves are essential tools in health care and are defined as disposable gloves used during medical procedures. However, gloves can become contaminated just like bare hands and do not offer 100% protection. Therefore, gloves should be removed—such as after touching a patient—and hand hygiene should be performed immediately according to the WHO 5 Moments for Hand Hygiene.

Key message 2: Regardless of whether gloves are worn, hand hygiene performed at the right times and in the correct manner

remains one of the most important actions to protect both patients and health workers. By 2026, hand hygiene compliance monitoring and feedback should be established as a key national indicator, at the very least in all reference hospitals. Currently, 68% of countries are reporting such activities, indicating progress but also room for improvement.

Key message 3: Excessive glove use significantly increases health care waste. Appropriate glove use and hand hygiene can help reduce this burden. Using gloves when not indicated wastes resources and does not necessarily prevent the spread of infection. For example, an average university hospital generates around 1,634 tonnes of health care waste annually, a figure that is increasing by 2–3% each year, especially since the COVID-19 pandemic. Higher-income countries contribute more significantly to this waste.

By emphasising appropriate glove use and reinforcing hand hygiene, WHO’s 2025 campaign links patient safety, environmental sustainability, and health system resilience.

Source: World Health Organisation



HAVE A NICE DAY

Wealth in wallets, gaps in souls

Despite the global rise in studies exploring the impact of prosocial behaviour on broader happiness, there remains a critical gap in empirical research from Asia, particularly South Asia—the world’s most populous and culturally diverse region. Over the past decade, the term happiness has gained public attention through rankings like the UN World Happiness Report. Strikingly, the top twenty happiest nations are mostly affluent Western countries. But does economic prosperity truly translate into happiness?

While income can improve life satisfaction, it does not ensure emotional fulfilment or long-term contentment. The Easterlin Paradox first highlighted that rising wealth does not equate to rising happiness beyond a certain income threshold. Later, Kahneman and Deaton (2010) found that emotional well-being plateaus once basic needs are met. Harvard study shows that deep, meaningful relationships—not wealth—are the strongest predictors of happiness and longevity.

Psychologists often categorise happiness into three types: physical happiness (meeting basic needs like nutrition and sleep), hedonic happiness (short-term pleasure and comfort), and eudaimonic (sustainable) or prefrontal. It is here that kindness and moral values play a transformative role.

According to some other studies, only 10% of happiness is influenced by circumstances like income, while 40% stems from intentional acts—especially kindness, gratitude, and connection. As such, cultivating kindness and ethical awareness may be the most accessible and profound way to close the soul’s growing gap in an age of material excess.

In the South Asian context, where cultural traditions already value compassion and community, these findings call for a renewed focus on empathy, dignity, and moral education, not just economic development, to foster true and lasting well-being.

Powering health through hormone awareness

DR SHAHJADA SELIM

April 24, 2025, marks the worldwide observance of World Hormone Day, with this year’s powerful theme: “*Because Hormones Matter*”. While dedicated days exist for specific hormone-related conditions like diabetes, thyroid disorders, and PCOS, this comprehensive initiative addresses all hormonal health aspects holistically.

Hormonal disorders affect millions globally, yet there remains a critical gap in:

- Preventive healthcare strategies
- Integrated treatment approaches
- Resource allocation for hormone-related care

Originally launched by the European Society of Endocrinology, this observance has expanded beyond Europe over the past two years, with the Bangladesh Endocrine Society now actively participating to advance hormone health awareness nationally.

Hormones regulate nearly every bodily function, including growth and development, metabolic processes, reproductive and sexual health, mental wellbeing and cognitive function.

Imbalances can trigger diabetes, thyroid disorders, infertility, obesity, and numerous other chronic conditions.

While endocrinology specialists were scarce previously, Bangladesh now boasts a growing number of qualified hormone specialists (endocrinologists) working to expand patient access to specialised care, improve diagnostic capabilities, enhance treatment outcomes nationwide.

Key lifestyle recommendations:

1. *Eat hormone-friendly foods:* Prioritise vitamin D, iodine, and calcium-rich options.
2. *Maintain regular physical activity:* Moderate exercise helps regulate hormonal balance.
3. *Prioritise quality sleep:* 7 hours (6-8 hours range) nightly supports proper hormone secretion
4. *Reduce exposure to endocrine disruptors:* Minimise contact with plastics, pesticides, and processed chemicals.

We can transform understanding of hormone health and create lasting positive change.

The writer is an Associate Professor of Department of Endocrinology at Bangladesh Medical University. E-mail: selimshahjada@gmail.com

Necessity of private medical universities for the development of the healthcare industry in Bangladesh

SAKIF SHAMIM

The future of the healthcare sector of Bangladesh highly depends on its medical education system. The demand for highly skilled doctors, researchers and healthcare professionals is increasing with a growing population and evolving healthcare needs. Private medical universities have been playing a crucial role to meet the demand. So thereby, private medical universities are no longer an option for the development of the healthcare sector in Bangladesh; rather, they have become a necessity.

Over the past years, Bangladesh has suffered to meet the demand of medical graduates. Many students are travelling to the foreign countries for medical education. They spend billions in these foreign institutions. This is not just a financial drain but also a loss of talent since most of these graduates do not return to the country. But, through providing world-class medical education here in this country, private medical universities can reverse this trend. It will ensure the brightest minds stay in the country & serve the people of our country.

Private sectors have already brought a revolution to the healthcare sector of Bangladesh, but there is still a long way to go. The similar vision should be extended to medical education as well. Private medical universities can create an ecosystem where education, research & medical practices can work together and produce doctors who are both academically excellent & trained in real-world patient care.

This will take Bangladesh a step ahead to become the hub of medical education in South Asia.

Furthermore, private medical universities can take medical research to another level. We will not have to rely on foreign studies and research to face healthcare challenges if we invest in our own research. Private hospitals have already elevated our healthcare industry, and I believe that private universities will do the same for medical education. The future of healthcare in Bangladesh depends on the quality of medical research, and private medical universities can play a crucial role here.

Moreover, the medical field is not just composed of doctors and nurses. It is a vast system that includes hospital administration, medical technology, diagnostics, telemedicine, pharmaceuticals and, above all, health policy. To serve this industry, Bangladesh needs medical graduates who not only excel in their academics but also are job-ready.

Private medical schools can structure courses that blend several disciplines, provide real-world experience in the healthcare environments of the day, and encourage coordination with healthcare companies and hospitals. Such a focus on industry needs guarantees that graduates are immediately ready to assist, improving the productivity, service quality, and competitiveness of the healthcare industry worldwide.

The writer is the Managing Director of Labaid Cancer Hospital and Super Speciality Centre and Deputy Managing Director of Labaid Group. E-mail: sakif@labaidcancer.com



DR MOHAMMAD SIDDIQUE

Heart disease remains a leading cause of death worldwide, yet one of its major risk factors—high cholesterol—often goes unnoticed. With no visible symptoms, high cholesterol can quietly damage your arteries for years before showing any warning signs. That is why understanding and managing cholesterol is essential for protecting your heart health.

Often dubbed the “silent killer”, cholesterol plays a key role in heart disease—one of the top causes of death globally. Cholesterol is a waxy, fat-like substance present in the blood. While it is essential for important functions like building cells, excess cholesterol can be harmful. Because high cholesterol typically presents no symptoms, it can quietly build up in the arteries, forming plaque that narrows the passageways and restricts blood flow—setting the stage for heart disease.

As plaque accumulates in the arteries, it limits the flow of oxygen-rich blood to the heart. This can lead to chest pain (angina) and, in severe cases, trigger a heart attack if a clot blocks blood flow completely.

Several factors may raise cholesterol levels, such as genetics, poor diet, sedentary lifestyle, smoking, and being overweight. The good news? High cholesterol is both preventable and treatable. Healthy lifestyle choices—like eating a balanced diet, exercising regularly, avoiding tobacco, and maintaining a healthy weight—can greatly reduce your risk.

Here are some heart-smart tips to reduce cholesterol:

- Eat more fruits, vegetables, and fibre-rich foods.
- Limit saturated and trans fats—check food labels carefully.
- Choose lean protein sources like fish, legumes, or skinless poultry.
- Stay physically active—aim for at least 150 minutes of moderate exercise per week.
- Quit smoking and limit alcohol intake.
- Get your cholesterol levels checked every 4–6 years (or more often if at risk).

Take the opportunity to prioritise your heart health. If you have not already, get your cholesterol checked. A simple lipid panel blood test can offer critical insight. Consult with a doctor to review your results and develop a plan to manage your cholesterol effectively.

The writer is a research scholar based in Washington D.C., USA.

How ultra-processed foods can cut your life short

Ultra-processed foods—like sugary drinks, packaged snacks, instant noodles, and frozen ready meals—are increasingly dominating diets around the world. Though convenient and often affordable, a growing body of global research shows that high consumption of these products may significantly reduce lifespan.

A major international study across eight countries found that each 10% increase in daily calories from ultra-processed foods raised the risk of early death by 3%. This risk is not tied to one specific illness—it applies across causes of death. That is because ultra-processed

foods tend to be low in essential nutrients and high in harmful additives, sugars, salts, and unhealthy fats.

These products are often found in the inner aisles of supermarkets and can make up more than half of daily caloric intake in some regions. They are linked not only to obesity, diabetes, and heart disease but also to higher rates of depression and gut microbiome imbalance.

Here are some simple ways to reduce intake:

- Cook more at home using fresh or minimally processed ingredients.
- Shop the outer aisles of

supermarkets where fruits, vegetables, dairy, and fresh proteins are typically stocked.

- Read labels carefully: avoid items with long ingredient lists or unfamiliar additives.
 - Replace snacks like chips and biscuits with nuts, fruit, or homemade alternatives.
 - Prepare meals in batches to avoid relying on packaged convenience foods during busy days.
- Eating fewer ultra-processed foods and more whole foods is a small shift that could add years to your life—and improve its quality.

