

## RISING COVID-19 CASES essential steps to protect yourself and others

STAR HEALTH DESK

As COVID-19 cases are once again on the rise in many parts of the world, it is crucial for individuals and communities to take proactive measures to slow the spread of the virus. The pandemic is not over, and with new variants emerging, the risk of infection remains significant.

First and foremost, vaccination continues to be the most effective way to protect yourself and others from severe illness. If you're eligible and haven't been vaccinated yet, now is the time to get your shots. Additionally, if you're due for a booster dose, make sure to get it to ensure lasting protection.

Mask-wearing remains important, especially in crowded indoor spaces or areas with high transmission rates. Even if you are fully vaccinated, wearing a mask reduces the risk of spreading the virus, particularly if you are asymptomatic or pre-symptomatic.

Maintaining physical distancing is another critical step. Avoid large gatherings, particularly indoors, and try to keep a safe distance from others when possible. This helps limit close contact, which is one of the main ways COVID-19 spreads.

Frequent handwashing and the use of hand sanitisers are essential practices, as the virus can survive on surfaces for extended periods. Clean your hands regularly and avoid touching your face, particularly your eyes, nose, and mouth.

Finally, if you experience symptoms or have been in contact with someone who has tested positive, self-isolate and seek medical advice. Remember, don't panic—stay calm and follow the guidelines. Avoid spreading false rumours or unverified information that can cause unnecessary fear and confusion.

By following these steps, we can work together to protect ourselves, our families, and our communities from the growing threat of COVID-19.



## WORLD BLOOD DONOR DAY 2025

# GIVE BLOOD, GIVE HOPE together we save lives

**On 14 June, the world celebrates World Blood Donor Day, a global event dedicated to honouring the millions of voluntary, unpaid blood donors who offer others a second chance at life. Their generosity not only saves lives but also strengthens communities and represents the true spirit of solidarity. This day serves as both a time for gratitude and a call to action, emphasising the ongoing and urgent need for safe, regular blood donations.**

STAR HEALTH DESK

This year, the campaign highlights the theme of hope—hope that flows with every drop of blood. Each year, millions of patients around the world rely on blood transfusions to survive. Every single blood donation plays a significant role in offering hope to those who need it most. Blood donations can mean the difference between life and death, and the need for a steady and safe blood supply is becoming more critical than ever.

The key objectives of World Blood Donor Day are to raise public awareness about the critical need for blood and plasma donations, encourage both new and existing donors to give blood regularly, and highlight the enormous impact blood donors have on the health and well-being of others. The campaign also urges governments and development partners to invest in and sustain national blood programmes, ensuring universal access to safe blood transfusions worldwide.

One of the central messages of this year's campaign is that safe blood saves lives. A single blood donation

can help save up to three lives. This powerful message underscores the life-saving impact of blood donation on individuals in need. Every blood donation is more than just a medical procedure; it is a gift of hope. For many patients, this hope could be the difference between life and death.

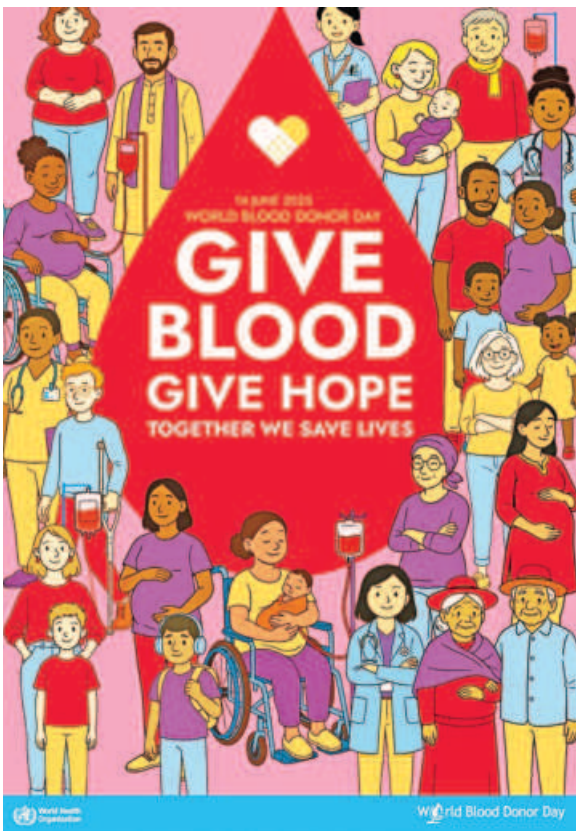
The theme of solidarity is another key message for this year's campaign. Blood donation is a collective effort, and when communities come together to donate, they ensure a safe and steady blood supply for everyone. Whether it is for emergencies, surgeries, or long-term treatments, blood donations are essential in maintaining a reliable blood supply. However, in many parts of the world, especially where donation systems are still developing, the demand for blood often exceeds the available supply. This creates a pressing need for more regular donors to ensure timely access to safe blood.

The campaign encourages regular voluntary blood donations, urging individuals to donate blood as often as possible. This is necessary to ensure that countries have a consistent

and reliable blood supply for all who need it. Additionally, access to safe blood is a crucial component of universal health coverage and is vital for the smooth functioning of health systems. Governments are encouraged to invest in strong national blood programmes that ensure safe blood transfusions are accessible to everyone, regardless of where they live.

The campaign encourages everyone to become a voluntary blood donor and inspire others to do the same. Regular blood donations save lives, and by encouraging friends and family to donate, individuals help ensure a steady and sufficient supply. Governments and health ministries are urged to organise activities that promote blood donation and to ensure that the infrastructure needed to support blood services is in place. National blood transfusion services are encouraged to improve donor care and focus on building stronger systems to handle blood donations effectively.

**Source:** World Health Organisation



## Dense breasts and mammograms: what comes next?

**Getting your yearly mammogram is a great step for your health. But there is one more important thing to check—do you have dense breast tissue? More than 40% of women do, and it can make it harder to spot cancer on a mammogram.**

Dense breasts have more glands and tissue and less fat. On a mammogram, dense areas and cancer both appear white, which can hide signs of cancer. Your mammogram report will say if your breasts are “heterogeneously dense” (mostly dense) or “extremely dense” (almost no fat). If you are not sure, ask your doctor or check your report online.

Why this matters: Regular mammograms can miss up to 30–40% of cancers in dense breasts. That is why some women need extra tests like an MRI, breast ultrasound, or a special type of mammogram that uses contrast dye. These tests can help find cancer that a regular mammogram might miss.



Not all doctors automatically suggest these extra tests, and not all insurance plans cover them. Some tests, like MRI, can be expensive, but quicker and cheaper options are becoming available. A 3D mammogram is also better than the standard version and may be covered by insurance.

In the end, the decision to get extra screening depends on your personal risk factors (like family history) and your comfort level. Extra tests can be stressful or costly—but catching cancer early can save your life.

Talk to your doctor and learn your options. The more you know, the better choices you can make.

## Choosing the right sunscreen: what you need to know

As summer approaches, protecting yourself from the sun remains crucial. Recent studies have raised concerns about the safety and effectiveness of certain sunscreens, but understanding how sunscreen works and choosing the right one is key to staying safe.

First, SPF (sun protection factor) is vital. It indicates the level of protection against UVB rays, with higher numbers providing more protection. SPF 30 blocks about 97% of UVB rays, while SPF 50 blocks 98%, and SPF 100 blocks 99%. For daily use, experts recommend at least SPF 30.

Sunscreens come in chemical and mineral varieties. Chemical sunscreens absorb UV rays and convert them into heat, while mineral sunscreens (containing zinc oxide or titanium dioxide) sit on top of your skin to physically block UV rays. Both types protect against UVB and UVA rays, but mineral sunscreens tend to be gentler on sensitive skin and are a better option for those with conditions like eczema.

For added protection, choose broad-spectrum sunscreens, which safeguard against both UVA and UVB rays. Water-resistant formulas are ideal for activities like swimming or sweating but should be reapplied every two hours.

While choosing sunscreen, avoid relying solely on sprays, as they may contain harmful chemicals like benzene. Lotion-based sunscreens are often safer and more effective.

Lastly, do not forget to reapply sunscreen regularly, wear protective clothing, and seek shade, especially during peak sun hours, to ensure complete sun safety.

# CHILDHOOD CANCER Together for hope – bridging gaps, saving lives

DR ABDULLAHEL AMAAN &  
DR KHAINOOR ZAHAN

Cancer is a leading cause of death for children and adolescents. Each year, an estimated 400,000 children (aged 0–19 years) develop cancer globally. Unlike cancer in adults, most childhood cancers do not have a known cause. However, some chronic infections are suspected, such as HIV, Epstein-Barr virus, hepatitis B, human papillomavirus (causing uterine cervical cancer), etc.

The most common types of childhood cancer include blood cancer (leukaemia), brain cancer, lymphomas, kidney tumours, and nerve tissue tumours. Although childhood cancer cannot generally be prevented or identified through screening, most types of childhood cancer can be

cured with medicines and other forms of treatment, including surgery and radiotherapy.

Childhood cancer is associated with a range of warning symptoms, such as fever, severe and persistent headaches, bone pain and weight loss, which can be detected by families. When identified early, cancer is more likely to respond to effective treatment and result in a greater probability of survival, less suffering, and often less expensive and less intensive treatment. An early diagnosis consists of awareness of symptoms by families, accurate and timely clinical evaluation, diagnosis, and staging (determining the extent to which a cancer has spread) and access to prompt treatment.

A correct diagnosis is essential to prescribe appropriate therapy for the type and extent of the disease. Standard



therapies include chemotherapy, surgery and/or radiotherapy.

Children also need special attention to their continued physical and mental growth and nutritional status, which requires a dedicated, multidisciplinary team. Palliative care relieves symptoms caused by cancer and improves the quality of life of patients and their families. Not all children with cancer

can be cured, but relief of suffering is possible for everyone.

Paediatric palliative care is considered a core component of comprehensive care, starting when the disease is diagnosed and continuing throughout treatment and care, regardless of whether a child receives treatment with curative intent. Palliative care programmes can be delivered through community and home-based care, providing pain relief and psychosocial support to patients and their families.

However, a cure is possible for more than 80% of children with cancer when childhood cancer services are accessible. But access to effective diagnosis, essential medicines and radiation therapy, pathology, blood products, technology and psychosocial and supportive care are variable and

inequitable around the world.

In 2018, WHO launched, with the support of St. Jude Children's Research Hospital, USA, the Global Initiative for Childhood Cancer to provide leadership and technical assistance to governments to support them in building and sustaining high-quality childhood cancer programmes. The goal is to achieve at least 60% survival for all children with cancer by 2030. This represents an approximate doubling of the current cure rate and will save an additional 1 million lives over the next decade.

*The writers are the assistant professors of neonatology at the Institute of Child & Mother Health (ICMH), Matuail, Dhaka. Emails: abdullahelamaan@gmail.com, khainoorzahan@gmail.com*

## Bangladesh steps forward in advanced healthcare with stem cell therapy

DR SHAKIRA NOVA

Health is one of the most important aspects of life, influencing our physical, mental, and emotional well-being. Being proactive about health and preventing illness is crucial, but when serious conditions arise, advanced medical solutions become necessary. In recent years, regenerative medicine has opened new frontiers in treating complex and chronic diseases. Now, Bangladesh has made significant progress in this field with the establishment of Concord Stem Cell Limited, the country's pioneer regenerative healthcare and research centre.

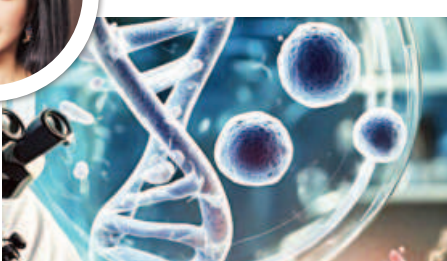
Located in Dhaka, Concord Stem Cell Limited is approved by the Directorate General of Drug Administration (DGDA) of Bangladesh for offering advanced stem cell therapy, starting with arthritis. The centre provides innovative treatments like Platelet Rich Plasma (PRP), Stromal Vascular Fraction (SVF) Therapy, Mesenchymal Stem Cell (MSC) Therapy, Hyperbaric Oxygen Therapy (HBOT), and more.

This pioneering clinic aligns with global advancements in stem cell science, offering a wide range of services including pain management, aesthetic therapy, neurological support, stem cell banking, and treatments for chronic illnesses like diabetes and respiratory disease.

Stem cell research has roots in the 1960s, but its application in healthcare is now

rapidly transforming patient outcomes. By providing these therapies locally, Concord Stem Cell Limited offers a cost-effective and accessible option for people in Bangladesh who would otherwise travel abroad for such treatments.

Mr Faizur Rahman, Managing Director of Concord, emphasises their commitment to offering advanced regenerative healthcare guided by WHO principles of quality and integrity. The centre not only treats ailments but also promotes rejuvenation therapies like facial treatments,



hair regrowth, and sexual health solutions. With this groundbreaking development, Bangladesh has entered a new era of modern medicine. The presence of such a facility reflects the country's growing capabilities in healthcare innovation and provides hope for treating previously incurable conditions.

*The writer is a consultant endocrinologist at the Concord Diagnostics & Molecular Lab. E-mail: drssrnova@gmail.com*

## Daily rituals for a stronger immunity

RAISA MEHZABEEN

In an era when health crises can arise unexpectedly, building and maintaining a strong immune system has become more than just a wellness trend—it is a necessary lifestyle. Strengthening immunity isn't about shortcuts or miracle cures but about consistent, conscious actions that support the body's natural defence mechanisms. The steps outlined below, deeply rooted in both traditional knowledge and scientific rationale, can be powerful tools to safeguard our health.

Firstly, regular physical activity in sunlight is vital. Engaging in at least 30 minutes of outdoor exercise daily—whether it is brisk walking, cycling, weightlifting, or simply carrying groceries—enhances circulation, stimulates white blood cell production, and aids vitamin D synthesis. Vitamin D, often called the “sunshine vitamin”, is critical in modulating the immune response.

Secondly, maintaining a proper circadian rhythm is crucial. Turning off artificial lights after 8 PM and having dinner around sunset helps regulate melatonin production and improves sleep

quality—both of which have a direct impact on immune health. Good sleep restores the body and enhances the efficiency of immune cells like T-cells and cytokines.

Incorporating immune-boosting foods into the diet is another key strategy. Garlic and ginger, known for their antiviral and anti-inflammatory properties, can be easily added to salads and cooked meals. Turmeric, especially when paired with black pepper and lemon juice, can enhance antioxidant levels and reduce inflammation. A healthful drink combining turmeric, lemon, and 500 mg of vitamin C powder, consumed 4–5 times a day in small doses, can significantly support the body's natural defences.

Vitamin C plays a frontline role in immune protection. Consuming therapeutic doses—around 1,000 mg two to three times daily—can help reduce the severity and duration of infections. Pairing it with chamomile tea, known for its calming and immune-regulating effects, creates a synergistic boost.

Traditional remedies like black seed (Nigella sativa) also deserve attention. Consuming one teaspoon of black seed

in the morning and at night has been traditionally used for strengthening immunity. Additionally, a warm beverage made from ginger, turmeric, cinnamon, clove, and garlic can be an effective natural tonic.

The integration of these practices into daily life does not require expensive supplements or extreme lifestyle changes. Rather, they encourage a return to natural rhythms, mindful nutrition, and balanced living. While no single measure can provide immunity against all diseases, a consistent combination of these strategies can significantly reduce vulnerability to infections.

In conclusion, building a resilient immune system is not about fear—it is about empowerment. With regular effort, conscious dietary choices, and alignment with natural cycles, we can arm ourselves with the best defence nature and science have to offer. Let this be a reminder that health is in our hands, and immunity is a daily investment, not a one-time cure.

*The writer is the founder & CEO of Nutrition For Change. E-mail: raisameh20@gmail.com*