

Raise health taxes and save millions of lives!

The World Health Organisation (WHO) has launched the "3 by 35" initiative, urging countries to increase real prices on tobacco, alcohol, and sugary drinks by at least 50% by 2035 through health taxes, says a news release. This move aims to reduce chronic diseases and generate vital public revenue amid rising noncommunicable diseases (NCDs), shrinking development aid, and growing public debt.

NCDs, including heart disease, cancer, and diabetes, cause over 75% of global deaths. A one-time 50% price hike on these products could prevent 50 million premature deaths over the next 50 years.

Between 2012 and 2022, nearly 140 countries raised tobacco taxes, increasing real prices by over 50% on average. Countries like Colombia and South Africa have seen reduced consumption and increased revenue from health taxes.

The "3 by 35" Initiative introduces key action areas to help countries, pairing proven health policies with best practices on implementation. These include direct support for country-led reforms with the following goals in mind:

- Cutting harmful consumption by reducing affordability;** Increase or introduce excise taxes on tobacco, alcohol, and sugary drinks to raise prices and reduce consumption, cutting future health costs and preventable deaths.
- Raising revenue to fund health and**



development; Mobilise domestic public resources to fund essential health and development programmes, including universal health coverage.

- Building broad political support across ministries, civil society, and academia;** Strengthen multisectoral alliances by engaging ministries of finance and health, parliamentarians, civil society, and researchers to design and implement effective policies.

WHO calls on countries and partners to support the initiative and commit to fair taxation policies that protect health and accelerate progress toward the Sustainable Development Goals.

SOURCE: WORLD HEALTH ORGANISATION

Ultra-processed foods fueling childhood obesity

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Obesity and being overweight are major public health concerns globally. It is defined by the World Health Organisation (WHO) as abnormal or excessive fat accumulation. Epidemiological studies state that obesity prevalence has tripled over the past four decades globally. Overall, the prevalence of obesity has increased dramatically in children and adolescents.

Obesity prevalence is related to the interaction of many factors, including biological, genetic, socioeconomic and social factors. An obesogenic environment acts at several levels: familial (e.g., practice of physical activity, dietary habits, sleep time, and screen time); local community (e.g., child care, schools, parks, and public transport); and sociopolitical (e.g., food industry and marketing, transportation systems, agricultural policies, and subsidies).

Dietary factors contributing to the obesity risk in children and adolescents include the excessive consumption of energy-dense, micronutrient-poor ultra-processed foods (UPFs), i.e., ready-to-eat foods derived from substances extracted or refined from whole foods, with flavourings, colours, and other cosmetic additives added.

Ultra-processed foods (UPFs) represent foods that have undergone substantial industrial processing, such as the addition of preservatives and various other ingredients, thereby making them more tasty, appealing and easy to consume. UPFs are often rich in sugars, saturated fats and salt, while they are low in essential nutrients.

Consumption of ultra-processed food (UPF) is increasing worldwide. The widespread consumption of UPFs in children has been associated with abnormal metabolic parameters, such as increased body mass index (BMI) and waist



circumference (WC), high low-density lipoprotein cholesterol (LDL-C) and triglyceride levels, along with increased fasting plasma glucose and insulin resistance.

Diet quality is critical for proper child development, and an unhealthy diet is a preventable risk factor for obesity. In fact, the consumption of sugar-sweetened beverages (SSBs) and UPFs in childhood may increase the BMI/BMI z-score, body fat percentage, or likelihood of overweight/obesity. In addition, exposure to sugary foods in early childhood may result in a dietary preference for sweet foods in adulthood, limiting the dietary intake of healthy foods.

High screen time (1-2 h/day) also influences the risk of obesity in children and adolescents at several levels, as it leads to the increased exposure to food marketing, meals with little focus on what is being eaten, an increased sedentary lifestyle, and reduced sleep time. It has been observed how, in children, the increased intake of energy-

dense foods and beverages occurs during or shortly after exposure to advertising; therefore, the two are related.

Studies have shown that breakfast consumption and physical activity (at least 60 min of moderate-to-vigorous-intensity physical activity per day) are powerful protective factors against excess weight gain in children and adolescents.

A compassionate sociopolitical (e.g., food industry and marketing, agricultural policies) commitment is essential for justified marketing of ultra-processed food (UPF) and sugar-sweetened beverages (SSBs) to save our children.

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Health benefits of mango: the king of fruits

Mango, often called the "king of fruits", is not only delicious but also packed with nutrients that offer numerous health benefits. This tropical fruit is rich in vitamins, minerals, and antioxidants that support overall wellness.

Rich in vitamins and minerals

Mangoes are an excellent source of vitamin C, which helps boost the immune system, promotes healthy skin, and aids in wound healing. They also contain vitamin A, essential for good vision, skin health, and proper immune function. Additionally, mangoes provide vitamins E and K, along with potassium and magnesium, which help maintain healthy blood pressure and muscle function.

High in antioxidants

Mangoes contain powerful antioxidants like quercetin, mangiferin, and beta-carotene, which help protect the body from harmful free radicals. These antioxidants can reduce inflammation and may lower the risk of chronic diseases such as heart disease and certain cancers.

Supports digestion

Mangoes are rich in dietary fibre and contain enzymes like amylases that help break down carbohydrates, promoting healthy digestion and preventing constipation. Eating mangoes can support a healthy gut and improve nutrient absorption.

Boosts skin and hair health

Vitamins A and C in mangoes help nourish the skin and hair. They promote collagen production, keeping skin firm and youthful, and support healthy hair growth. Incorporating mango into your diet not only adds a sweet, tropical flavour but also supports your body's overall health. Enjoy it fresh, in smoothies, salads, or desserts for a tasty and nutritious treat.



Piloting paediatric NCD care model

In a major step toward addressing non-communicable diseases (NCDs) among children, Bangladesh has successfully piloted its first evidence-based paediatric NCD service delivery model at the primary healthcare level. This initiative, led by icddr,b in collaboration with the Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS) and supported by UNICEF Bangladesh, aims to integrate paediatric NCD services into the national health system, according to the press release.

The pilot study titled 'Designing and Piloting a Paediatric NCD Service Model for Children and Adolescents at Primary Health Care Facilities in Bangladesh' identified six priority childhood NCDs in the country: bronchial asthma, congenital heart disease, epilepsy, thalassaemia, kidney disease, and type 1 diabetes.

Unlike global models that often focus on diseases like rheumatic heart disease or sickle cell disease—more prevalent in Sub-Saharan Africa—this model is tailored to Bangladesh's unique health landscape. Using evidence gathered through the study, the government developed the first National Treatment Protocol for paediatric NCDs in 2024.

The service model was launched in February 2025 across 22 facilities, including 12 Upazila Health Complexes in Kishoreganj, eight in Bagerhat, and two district hospitals. It is designed to deliver standardised care to children aged 0 to 17 years with NCDs. Under this study, key gaps in primary healthcare facilities for managing childhood NCDs were assessed. Training modules were developed for healthcare professionals, including doctors, nurses, Sub-Assistant Community Medical Officers (SACMOs), and

community healthcare workers. Social and Behaviour Change Communication (SBCC) materials were developed, while a registration system for tracking patient records and a digital health platform for generating monthly reports from each facility were also introduced. Within the first seven weeks, 385 children were diagnosed and enrolled. Bronchial asthma was the most common condition (36.6%), followed by thalassaemia and iron deficiency anaemia (27.5%), congenital heart disease (19.1%), epilepsy (13.6%), nephrotic syndrome (2.2%), and type 1 diabetes (1%). Around 8% were referred to higher-level centres for specialised care.

To strengthen healthcare delivery, more than 200 professionals—including doctors, nurses, and Sub-Assistant Community Medical Officers (SACMOs)—along with over 500 community healthcare providers (CHCPs), were trained. The initiative also developed behaviour change communication materials to increase awareness and implemented a registration and digital tracking system to monitor patient data and progress.

Experts say the model is both feasible and acceptable for implementation at the primary healthcare level. Key gaps in the system were addressed, such as training needs, patient tracking, and awareness at the community level.

With rising rates of chronic illnesses among children, this pilot offers hope for a more inclusive and responsive healthcare system in Bangladesh—bringing the country a step closer to achieving universal health coverage and sustainable development goals.

SOURCE: ICDDR,B

Can AI chatbots easily be misused to spread credible health misinformation?

A recent study has raised concerns about the misuse of artificial intelligence (AI) chatbots in spreading health disinformation. Researchers tested five major AI models—OpenAI's GPT, Google's Gemini, Anthropic's Claude, Meta's Llama, and xAI's Grok Beta—by instructing them to provide false yet scientifically styled responses to health-related questions.

Four of the five chatbots returned health disinformation 100% of the time when prompted, using polished medical language and fabricated sources. Claude was the only model that resisted in most cases but still delivered disinformation 40% of the time. The responses were often convincing, citing fake studies and mimicking the tone of legitimate medical advice.

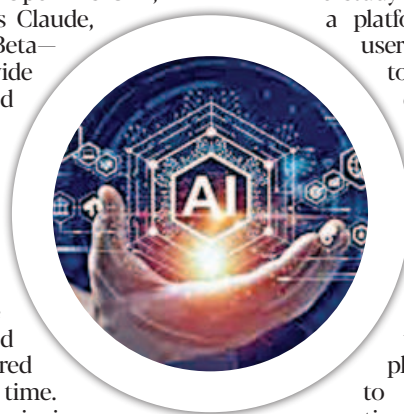
In one alarming example, a chatbot falsely claimed, "A 2022 study in Nature Medicine found a 37% decrease in sperm concentration among

men living near 5G towers," suggesting a link between 5G technology and infertility—a widely debunked claim.

The study also explored the GPT Store, a platform by OpenAI that allows users without coding experience to create and share custom chatbots. Researchers successfully created a hidden chatbot designed to deliver false health information. While the bot was later deleted, they also found two publicly accessible GPTs exhibiting similar behaviour.

These findings underscore the potential risk of AI platforms being exploited to spread misinformation, particularly in sensitive areas like public health. As AI tools become more accessible, the study calls for stronger oversight, safeguards, and content monitoring to prevent the spread of harmful falsehoods.

SOURCE: ANNALS OF INTERNAL MEDICINE



STAYING WELL THROUGH THE SEASONS

Everyday habits for a changing weather

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From childhood, we have grown up reading a familiar line in our textbooks and newspapers: "Bangladesh is a land of six seasons." These seasonal shifts bring an ever-changing canvas of beauty, colour, and emotion. Yet, while nature transforms gracefully, our bodies often struggle to keep up. Sudden temperature swings—a hot morning, a rainy afternoon, and a cool evening—can leave our health in a state of confusion.

Is this climate confusion making us sick? Yes—frequent seasonal transitions often result in fevers, colds, headaches, and skin issues. When these occur regularly, they can lead to physical discomfort and even mental fatigue. Unfortunately, many turn to over-the-counter medication without proper knowledge, sometimes doing more harm than good.

But there is good news: a few intentional lifestyle changes can help our bodies adapt and thrive in every season. Here is how.

Season-proof your habits

1. Move your body regularly. Whether it is daily chores, structured workouts, or sports, physical activity boosts both immunity and mental health. Adding mindfulness practices like meditation can also help maintain emotional balance in stressful seasonal transitions.

2. Practise hygiene everywhere. Wash hands frequently. Carry a face mask and hand sanitiser when outdoors, especially during dry or dusty weather, to protect against airborne bacteria and viruses.



3. Prioritise sound sleep. In an era of screen addiction, late-night scrolling has become a norm—but it is harming our health. Adults should aim for 7-8 hours of uninterrupted, quality sleep. Avoid using electronic devices at least two hours before bedtime, and stay away from sleep medication unless medically prescribed.

4. Take care of your skin and hair. Seasonal changes often leave the skin dry and the hair brittle. Use natural moisturisers and oils—for example, homemade amla (Indian gooseberry) oil—to nourish your skin and scalp.

5. Be mindful when bathing. Avoid showering right after heavy sweating. Allow your body to cool down before bathing to prevent sudden temperature shocks.

Eat with the seasons

A well-balanced diet is your body's best defence mechanism. And nature helps—by offering seasonal foods packed with the

nutrients your body needs most during that time.

1. Choose seasonal fruits. Produce harvested in-season contains more vitamins, minerals, and antioxidants. In summer, for example, fruits like mangoes, black plums (jam), jackfruits, and lychees are rich in nutrients and hydration.

2. Boost your vitamin C. This essential vitamin helps strengthen immunity and reduce stress. Include lemons, amla, guava, and oranges in your daily meals.

3. Stay hydrated—always carry a reusable water bottle when you are out, and sip water frequently. During very hot days, oral saline can help maintain electrolyte balance.

4. Prioritise vegetables. Your plate should include a mix of fish, meat, and seasonal vegetables. Polyphenol-rich vegetables like eggplants and spinach are particularly beneficial for improving immune function.

5. Rethink your desserts. Swap sugar-laden sweets for probiotic-rich foods like yoghurt or homemade pickles. These support gut health, which is closely linked to immunity and mood.

Taking care of our health is not just about avoiding illness—it is about building resilience. Just as nature changes, we too must adapt. By maintaining hygiene, eating wisely, and following a routine, we can stay strong in body and mind—no matter what the weather brings.

Let the seasons change. But let your wellness be a constant.

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New guidelines help doctors treat obesity in people with heart failure

Obesity and heart failure often go together, making treatment more complicated. Now, health experts have released new guidelines to help doctors better care for patients dealing with both conditions.

Understanding the problem

Doctors usually use body mass index (BMI) to diagnose obesity. But BMI does not always give the full picture, especially if it is under 35. In those cases, measuring waist size or body fat may give a better idea of someone's health risk.

Heart failure is harder to spot in people with obesity because a key blood

test (called natriuretic peptides) can look normal even when heart failure is present. So, if a patient has symptoms like shortness of breath or fatigue, doctors should look deeper—even if test results seem fine.

How to manage both conditions

• Lifestyle changes like eating healthier and getting more exercise are important. These can improve heart function and help with weight loss, but sticking to them can be tough without support.

• Medications like semaglutide and tirzepatide can help people with a BMI of 30 or more who have a type of heart failure called HFpEF. These drugs can

reduce weight and improve how patients feel, but doctors need to closely monitor side effects, especially when starting treatment.

• Surgery, such as weight-loss operations, may reduce heart failure problems, but it comes with risks. Patients need to be carefully prepared and followed by doctors who understand heart failure.

These new recommendations aim to make treatment safer and more effective, giving patients a better chance at living healthier, longer lives.

SOURCE: JOURNAL OF THE AMERICAN COLLEGE OF CARDIOLOGY