

## Ultra-processed foods under fire as experts called for global action!

A major new three-paper series published in The Lancet warned that the rapid rise of ultra-processed foods (UPFs) in diets around the world had become an urgent public health issue and required coordinated government action.

Authored by 43 global experts, the series reported that UPFs – such as packaged snacks, sugary drinks and many ready-to-eat products – were increasingly replacing fresh and minimally processed foods. Powerful food corporations, using aggressive marketing and political lobbying to boost sales and block effective regulation, drove this shift, according to the authors.

The first paper reviewed more than a decade of research and found strong links between high UPF consumption and poorer diet quality, overeating and higher risks of conditions including obesity, type 2 diabetes, heart disease, depression and early death. National surveys showed UPF intake had risen sharply in countries such as Spain, China, Brazil and Mexico, while remaining at very high levels in the UK and USA.

The second paper set out policy options to curb UPFs, including clearer front-of-pack labelling, tighter restrictions on advertising – especially to children – bans in schools and hospitals, and taxes on selected products to help fund access to healthier foods. Successful examples, such as Brazil’s school meals programme prioritising fresh food, were highlighted.

The final paper argued that corporations, not individual choices, were driving unhealthy diets. It compared the situation to tobacco control and called for global action to protect health policy from industry influence and to build fairer, healthier food systems that benefited communities rather than shareholders.



## Endometriosis: The common condition affecting millions of women worldwide

### STAR HEALTH DESK

Endometriosis affects an estimated 10% of women of reproductive age globally, around 190 million people. It is a chronic and often painful condition in which tissue similar to the lining of the uterus grows outside the womb, causing inflammation, scarring, and the formation of adhesions.

Symptoms vary widely but commonly include severe period pain, heavy menstrual bleeding, ongoing pelvic pain, infertility, and abdominal bloating or nausea. The condition most often occurs in the pelvis, but in some cases it affects other parts of the body, including the abdomen and chest. Endometriosis can also interfere with sexual intercourse, bowel movements, and urination, and it is linked to depression, anxiety, and other mental health challenges.

Endometriosis affects women from the start of menstruation through to menopause, regardless of ethnic or social background. It can also affect transgender men and non-binary people who menstruate. Despite its prevalence, there is no known cure. Treatment focuses on managing symptoms and reducing long-term impacts, using medicines or, in some cases, surgery.

Diagnosis remains a major challenge. Symptoms are often diverse or mistaken for “normal” period pain, leading to long delays in care. On average, it takes between four and 12 years to receive a diagnosis.

Treatments include pain relief such as non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs) and hormonal therapies, including contraceptives, progestins, and other hormone-based medicines. Surgery can remove lesions, adhesions, and scar tissue, though symptoms sometimes return.

Fertility treatments such as IVF may be recommended for those struggling to conceive. Multidisciplinary approaches, including physiotherapy and cognitive behavioural therapy, can also help manage pain and improve quality of life.

Endometriosis has wide-reaching health, social, and economic impacts. Chronic pain, heavy bleeding, fatigue, infertility, and poor mental health significantly reduce quality of life. Many individuals miss work or education, leading to lost income and financial strain. Social stigma and the normalisation of period pain often worsen these challenges, leaving many affected people feeling isolated or misunderstood.

There is currently no way to prevent endometriosis. Health experts stress that better awareness, earlier diagnosis, and access to quality care can help limit disease progression and long-term harm. Raising awareness, reducing stigma, and ensuring equitable access to diagnosis, treatment, and support services remain crucial. The condition continues to be a global health priority, particularly in low- and middle-income countries where access to specialised care is limited.

While there is no cure, early diagnosis, effective symptom management, and access to appropriate care can greatly improve quality of life.

SOURCE: WORLD HEALTH ORGANISATION



### DR K K PANDEY

You must have often heard your relatives or acquaintances saying that their fingers become numb in cold or snowy weather and often turn blue and swollen and cause severe pain. Sometimes, when one spends a lot of time in snowy weather, fingers turn black. Have you ever wondered why this happens?

**People suffering from Raynaud’s disease should avoid cold and ice**

People suffering from Raynaud’s disease, 90% of whom are women, should protect their fingers in cold weather. People who are associated with the food preservation industry should also take special care of their hands in cold weather. The hands of these people come in contact with cold and hot water frequently. People who use rotating tools like drilling machines, mixers or hair dryers in beauty parlours or spend a lot of time on pianos, harmoniums and typing machines should also protect their hands in icy cold weather.

**Patients with diabetes should take extra care**

Due to the continuous accumulation of fat and calcium in the pure blood vessels of the hands of diabetic

patients, the supply of pure blood is already less, and it reduces even more when cold hits them. If carelessness is shown, the fingers of the hands turn black. Therefore, diabetic patients should always keep their hands clean and dry. Always keep their hands covered with cotton or woollen gloves in cold and snowy weather. Never apply heat to the hands with an electric heater or a hot water bottle! Go for a morning walk only when the sun is shining! If black colour or a black scab is seen in the fingers of the hand, then immediately contact a vascular surgeon.

**Tobacco chewers and smokers should be careful in winters**

You must have noticed that often people who smoke hookah, tobacco and cigarettes have one or two fingers that are black or already cut. Often in extreme cold, the redness or tingling sensation in the hands of such people increases, and sometimes the pain becomes unbearable. The blood pipes of the hands of such people are already constricted due to the nicotine of tobacco, and on top of that, the supply of whatever blood is left in the hand is completely disrupted due to exposure to cold and frosty air. The result is gangrene and wounds

in the fingers. Such patients should completely stop consuming tobacco and smoking. If the pain is becoming unbearable and the colour of the fingers is turning black, then definitely consult an experienced vascular or cardiovascular surgeon; otherwise, in such circumstances, there can be a situation of losing fingers.

**Vasculitis patients should take special care of their hands**

The arrival of winter brings problems in the hands of patients suffering from vasculitis, i.e., inflammation of the walls of blood pipes of the hand. In winter, the walls of blood pipes swell, and often blood clots accumulate in the swollen blood pipes, and the flow of pure blood is completely blocked, and fingers of the hands may turn black. Such patients should protect their hands from cold and use some special medicines so that the clots do not accumulate in the blood vessels. Vasculitis patients should contact a vascular surgeon before the onset of winter and keep taking advice.

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## Gaibe Ora, Shunbe Prithibi: Hearing-impaired children redefine the power of music

### STAR HEALTH REPORT

Shono Bangladesh Hearing & Speech Clinic, an organisation dedicated to improving the quality of life of children with hearing and speech impairments, officially launched a special musical video entitled “Gaibe Ora, Shunbe Prithibi” (They Will Sing, and the World Will Listen) in the capital recently.

The video portrayed the real-life and inspiring journeys of children who had been born with hearing impairment as well as cochlear implant recipients, who, once unable to hear or speak, had embarked upon a new journey into the world of sound through modern medical intervention, cochlear implantation, and regular speech therapy, celebrating their courage, confidence, and remarkable achievements.



The event was honoured by the presence of distinguished guests, including Mr Mahfuz Anam, Editor & Publisher of The Daily Star; Mr Glen McGhee, Trustee Member of CRP (UK), on behalf of Dr Valerie Ann Taylor; Prof Dr Md Zakariya Sarker, Former Director of the National Institute of ENT & Hospital; Brigadier General Md Towfiq Hasan of BRAC Health Care; and Dr M Mainul Hafiz, Otolaryngologist. The speakers emphasised that with timely diagnosis, proper medical intervention, and consistent therapy, children with hearing impairment could grow into fully capable and self-reliant members of society, noting that such initiatives had played a vital role in raising public awareness about hearing and speech rehabilitation.

Mr Mohammad Saiful Islam, Managing Director of Shono Bangladesh Hearing & Speech Clinic, stated that the video was not merely a musical project but a message of hope for thousands of parents, demonstrating that with the right support at the right time, children with hearing impairment could sing, hear, and fulfil their dreams.

## Drug-resistant bloodstream infections set to rise across Europe

### STAR HEALTH REPORT

A new study has warned that bloodstream infections caused by drug-resistant bacteria are expected to rise significantly across Europe over the next few decades, largely due to ageing populations. The research, published in the open-access journal PLOS Medicine, was led by Gwenan Knight of the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, UK.

Antimicrobial resistance (AMR), where bacteria no longer respond to commonly used antibiotics, is a growing global health crisis. Resistant infections are more difficult to treat and can lead to longer hospital stays, serious illness, and higher mortality. To tackle this problem effectively, health experts need accurate predictions of how the burden of resistant infections is likely to change in the coming years.

In the study, researchers analysed over 12 million blood tests collected between 2010 and 2019 from 29 European countries. These tests measured how susceptible bacteria were to various antibiotics. Using this data, the team calculated the

incidence of bloodstream infections and projected how rates of drug-resistant infections might change up to 2050, taking into account population growth and ageing trends.

The findings revealed that bloodstream infection rates are expected to increase overall, although the burden will vary by country and by the type of bacteria. Men are projected to experience larger increases than women for most of the bacteria studied, while older adults, particularly those aged 74 and above, are likely to face the steepest rises. In contrast, rates among younger populations are expected to stabilise or decline.

Even with strong public health measures, the study suggested that achieving the United Nations’ goal of a 10% reduction in resistant infections by 2030 would only be possible for about two-thirds of bacteria-antibiotic combinations. This highlights the challenges of curbing the rise of antimicrobial resistance across Europe.

Gwenan Knight commented, “Our study shows that the future burden of drug-resistant infections

will not be uniform. There will be substantial differences between countries, age groups, and sexes. The steepest increases are projected in older adults, particularly those over 65. Simply preventing further rises in resistant bloodstream infections would already be a major public health achievement.”

She added, “It was particularly striking to bring together different types of data to see the bigger picture. Age and sex are still rarely considered in antimicrobial resistance projections, yet they have a real impact on who is most affected. Combining these factors with demographic and infection trends shows just how challenging it will be to reverse the steady rise in bloodstream infections across Europe.”

Coauthor Catrin Moore said, “This research is a major step forward in understanding how age and sex will influence the burden of drug-resistant infections in European countries. It will help us design targeted interventions for those most at risk, ultimately reducing deaths and serious illness caused by these infections in the future.”

The study underlines the urgent need for public health strategies that focus on high-risk populations, particularly older adults and men, alongside broader efforts to combat antimicrobial resistance.

## Global review reinforced vaccine safety on autism!

A new analysis from a World Health Organisation (WHO) global expert committee found no evidence of a causal link between vaccines and autism spectrum disorders (ASD), reaffirming WHO’s long-standing position on vaccine safety.

The Global Advisory Committee on Vaccine Safety (GACVS), an independent group of international experts, reviewed the latest scientific evidence on vaccines and autism. The analysis was discussed at the Committee’s meeting on 27 November 2025.

The review examined evidence from 31 major research studies published between 2010 and August 2025, using data from multiple countries. The findings showed a strong safety profile for vaccines used during childhood and pregnancy and confirmed there was no causal association between vaccines and ASD. This included vaccines containing thiomersal, a preservative that has been widely debated in the past.

The Committee also assessed evidence on vaccines containing aluminium adjuvants, drawing on studies conducted between 1999 and 2023, as well as a large nationwide cohort study from Denmark covering children born between 1997 and 2018. The evidence showed no link between the very small amounts of aluminium used in some vaccines and autism.

GACVS reaffirmed its previous conclusions from 2002, 2004 and 2012 that vaccines, including those containing thiomersal or aluminium, do not cause autism. WHO advised governments to base vaccination policies on the strongest scientific evidence, noting that childhood immunisation has saved at least 154 million lives globally over the past 50 years.

SOURCE: WORLD HEALTH ORGANISATION



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