

icddr,b and the government scale up life-saving bubble CPAP to combat measles and pneumonia in children

STAR HEALTH REPORT

Bangladesh is stepping up efforts to tackle a surge in measles-related child deaths, with icddr,b partnering the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare to scale up an innovative, low-cost respiratory support technology known as bubble CPAP, says a press release.

At a high-level meeting in Dhaka, Health Minister Sardar Md Sakhawat Husain joined icddr,b Executive Director Dr Tahmeed Ahmed, Senior Scientist Dr Mohammad Jobayer Chisti, and Professor Dr Md Mahbulul Haque of the Bangladesh Institute of Child Health to discuss urgent interventions. Experts warned that children aged six months to three years are at highest risk, with nearly 30 percent of hospitalised measles cases developing pneumonia.

Speakers highlighted that bubble CPAP, developed locally, offers a cost-effective and life-saving alternative to conventional ventilators, costing around BDT 300 per unit. Research published in The Lancet and field studies in Bangladesh and Ethiopia show it significantly improves survival compared to standard oxygen therapy.

A follow-up session with specialists from over 30 hospitals reinforced the need for rapid nationwide implementation. Training programmes are set to begin immediately, with icddr,b providing technical support to strengthen frontline care and reduce preventable child deaths.



Fit or just trending? The reality of gym culture among the youth

DR SUMAIYA KHALED

At 7 am, Arif (*not a real name*), a 21-year-old university student, finishes his workout and reaches for his protein shake. He checks the mirror, hoping for visible change. It has been three weeks. He feels stronger, but not transformed. Like many young people, he wonders if he is doing enough or if something more is missing. From university campuses to social media feeds, gym culture is having a moment in Bangladesh. For many young people, fitness is no longer just about health. It is about aesthetics, identity and discipline. Protein shakes, pre-workouts and supplement stacks have become as common as dumbbells. But beneath this growing trend lies an important question: is it actually working?

For some, regular exercise brings clear benefits. Improved strength, better mood and increased confidence are real outcomes. However, the rising obsession with rapid transformation is changing how fitness is approached. Many young gym-goers expect visible

results within weeks, often influenced by idealised online physiques that are rarely realistic or sustainable.

This is where supplements enter the conversation. Protein powders, fat burners and performance enhancers are increasingly marketed as shortcuts to success. While protein supplements can support muscle recovery when used appropriately, they are not magic solutions. In reality, most individuals can meet their protein needs through a balanced diet that includes eggs, fish, lentils and dairy.

The problem begins when supplements replace fundamentals. Irregular sleep, poor nutrition and inconsistent training cannot be fixed with a scoop of protein. Moreover, unregulated use of supplements raises concerns about safety, especially when products are taken without proper guidance or awareness of quality standards.

There is also a growing psychological dimension. For many young people, the gym is not just a place to exercise but a space tied

to self-worth. Progress becomes a measure of identity, and slow results can lead to frustration, comparison and unhealthy habits. Social media further amplifies this pressure, presenting curated versions of fitness that rarely reflect reality.

Fitness, at its core, is a long-term commitment. Sustainable progress comes from consistency, not intensity alone. Understanding one's body, setting realistic goals and prioritising overall wellbeing are far more important than chasing quick results.

As gym culture continues to expand, especially among youth, the focus must shift from appearance-driven goals to health-driven choices. Exercise should empower, not pressure. Supplements can support, but they cannot replace discipline, patience and balance.

Because in the end, fitness is not about looking strong for a moment, but staying strong for a lifetime.

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From micro habits to mindfulness

Mental health advice is everywhere, from social media reels to wellness apps, but not all trends translate into meaningful change. Experts say that while some popular tips can be helpful, the real value lies in consistency and context rather than quick fixes.

One widely shared strategy is the idea of "micro-habits" small, manageable actions such as taking a five-minute walk, practising brief breathing exercises or limiting screen time before bed. These simple steps can gradually improve mood and reduce stress when practised regularly.

Another growing trend is digital detoxing. While completely disconnecting may not be practical for many, setting boundaries such as no-phone hours or reduced social media use can help lower anxiety and improve sleep quality. Mental health professionals also highlight the importance of social connection. Meaningful conversations, even if brief, can



significantly boost emotional wellbeing.

Journaling and mindfulness exercises are also gaining popularity, offering individuals a way to process thoughts and manage overwhelming emotions. However, experts caution against treating these as one-size-fits-all solutions.

Ultimately, mental health is deeply personal. Trends may offer a starting point, but sustainable wellbeing depends on understanding individual needs, building supportive environments and seeking professional help when necessary.

Menstruation and nutrition: A missing link in women's health

RAISA MEHZABEEN

For decades, menstruation has been viewed largely as a reproductive concern. However, emerging evidence highlights a crucial but often overlooked dimension, nutrition. Experts now argue that menstrual health cannot be fully addressed without recognising its strong link to dietary status.

Each menstrual cycle places specific demands on the body. Blood loss during menstruation leads to depletion of essential nutrients, particularly iron. In Bangladesh, where anaemia remains widespread among women, this connection is especially significant. Without adequate intake, many women face fatigue, reduced concentration and lower productivity.

Speakers in the field also highlight that nutrients such as magnesium, vitamin B6, calcium and omega-3 fatty acids play a key role in easing common symptoms, including cramps, mood swings and low energy. Diets rich in leafy vegetables, whole grains, nuts and fish can support hormonal balance, while excessive sugar, caffeine and processed foods may worsen discomfort.

Adolescence is a particularly vulnerable stage. Many girls experience menarche alongside rapid



growth, yet menstrual education often focuses only on hygiene, overlooking nutrition. This gap can lead to irregular cycles, severe discomfort and long-term health risks.

Experts stress the need to integrate nutritional guidance into menstrual health programmes. Schools, healthcare providers and community initiatives must promote awareness of balanced diets and early management of deficiencies.

Reframing menstruation as a nutritional issue offers a more holistic approach. By addressing both biological and dietary factors, policymakers and practitioners can better support women's health and wellbeing.

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Bangladesh hosted global health hackathon focused on AI innovation

United International University hosted the seventh Harvard Health Systems Innovation Lab Hackathon on April 10 and 11, 2026, marking its second consecutive year as the only Bangladesh hub for the global event, according to a press release. Held at the Institute of Research, Innovation, Incubation and Commercialisation, the hackathon focused on building high-value health systems by leveraging artificial intelligence.

The Dhaka hub drew over 650 applications nationwide, from which 22 teams comprising 98 participants and four individual innovators were selected. Participants represented more than 20 universities and institutions, including Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology, the University of Dhaka, BRAC University and icddr,b.

Speakers and jury members included the Managing Director of Startup Bangladesh, CEO of United Ayyaz Harun Ortac and Professor Laura J Reichenbach, Dean of the James P Grant School of Public Health. They were joined by mentors and industry leaders who guided participants throughout the event.

Teams developed solutions addressing critical care, infectious diseases, maternal health and healthcare accessibility. The Dhaka champions received cash awards and an opportunity to join the HSIL Venture Incubation Programme, aimed at transforming innovative ideas into scalable health solutions.

The untapped power of nurses and midwives in Bangladesh's future

PROF MD ANISUR RAHMAN FORAZY

Bangladesh's healthcare future may depend more on its nurses and midwives than ever before. Often overlooked in policy discussions, these professionals are central to patient care, maternal health and hospital safety. Experts argue that strengthening their role is not a symbolic step but a structural necessity for a resilient health system.

Specialists highlight that nurses are the backbone of clinical care, monitoring patients, preventing infections and ensuring continuity long after doctors leave the room. Midwives, meanwhile, play a critical role in antenatal care, safe childbirth and newborn protection. Yet despite their importance, both groups remain underutilised and under-recognised within the system.

It is also highlighted that there is point to a persistent gap between demand and empowerment. Many professionals face long hours, limited authority and unclear career pathways, particularly in rural areas where healthcare access remains uneven. Without proper deployment, training and institutional support, their potential to strengthen frontline services remains unrealised.

At the same time, global demand



for skilled nurses and midwives is rising. Experts suggest Bangladesh could benefit from this trend by developing a structured pathway for ethical overseas employment, creating opportunities for skilled migration and foreign currency generation.

However, specialists caution that such strategies must balance domestic needs with global opportunities. Expanding training,

strengthening leadership roles and building public-private partnerships are essential steps.

Reframing nurses and midwives as central actors rather than support staff could transform healthcare delivery while opening new economic pathways for the country.

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WORLD HEALTH DAY 2026 SEMINAR Reimagining health systems for a changing world

A World Health Day 2026 seminar at North South University brought together leading voices in healthcare to explore how systems can evolve to meet modern challenges. Held on April 7 and organised by the NSU Public Health and Sciences Club, the event focused on reimagining health systems through equity, innovation and resilience.

The keynote address by Dr Dipak Kumar Mitra, Dean of the School of Health and Life Sciences, highlighted the importance of universal health coverage and the need for accessible and affordable care.

Guest speakers added diverse perspectives like, the growing threat

of antimicrobial resistance, quality and excellence in healthcare delivery, transformative potential of digital health, and rising burden of non-communicable diseases in Bangladesh.

As global health systems grapple with rising non-communicable diseases, emerging infections, and widening inequities, the need for resilient and adaptive healthcare models has never been more urgent. In Bangladesh, rapid urbanisation, demographic shifts, and technological transformation are reshaping health demands, calling for stronger policy, innovation, and collaboration across sectors.



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