

The hidden price of missed vaccines

STAR HEALTH REPORT

Bangladesh's recent measles surge is doing more than raising alarm over childhood illness—it may also be fuelling a larger public health challenge, says a press release. A new policy brief by the Global Antibiotic Resistance Partnership (GARP), led by the One Health Trust and icddr,b, warns that widening vaccination gaps could accelerate the rise of infections that are becoming harder to treat.

The report highlights a simple but powerful message: vaccines do more than prevent disease. By stopping infections before they start, they reduce the need for medicines and help slow the spread of stubborn germs that no longer respond to treatment.

The warning comes as Bangladesh faces one of its largest measles outbreaks in recent years, with more than 51,500 suspected cases and over 350 confirmed and suspected deaths reported by May 2026. Experts say disruptions in routine vaccination and declining confidence in vaccines have left dangerous gaps in protection.

Health experts warn that the recent measles outbreak should serve as a wake-up call, highlighting how quickly hard-won public health gains can be lost when vaccination coverage declines.

While Bangladesh has achieved remarkable success in controlling diseases such as polio and neonatal tetanus, the report stresses that these gains are not guaranteed. Strengthening routine vaccination, expanding access to key vaccines and placing immunisation at the heart of national health strategies could help protect lives today while preventing bigger challenges tomorrow.



THE MEDICINES LOSING THEIR MAGIC: Bangladesh's race against time

STAR HEALTH DESK

A hidden crisis is quietly claiming lives across the world. Medicines that once cured common infections are losing their power, turning routine illnesses into serious threats. In 2019 alone, around 1.27 million deaths worldwide were directly linked to this growing problem, and experts warn the toll could rise sharply if action is delayed. Bangladesh, like many countries, faces a particularly heavy burden. In 2021, an estimated 23,500 deaths in the country were directly linked to this challenge, while nearly 97,000 more deaths were associated with it.

The issue extends far beyond hospitals. It affects farms, food production, waterways, businesses and communities. Because germs and diseases do not respect borders, a problem in one country can quickly become a concern for many others. Recognising this, Bangladesh has spent the past several years strengthening its ability to monitor and respond to the threat through support from the Fleming Fund

Country Grant to Bangladesh.

One of the programme's most significant achievements was bringing together information that had previously been scattered across different sectors. By 2025, a national digital platform was collecting routine information from 42 laboratories and had compiled more than 200,000 records. This gave decision-makers a clearer picture of emerging trends and helped guide action more quickly and effectively.

The initiative also focused on improving confidence in laboratory findings. Better training, common standards and stronger quality checks helped ensure that information collected across the country could be trusted and compared. At the same time, animal health services were strengthened, encouraging more informed use of medicines in livestock and poultry and helping farmers make better decisions.

Environmental monitoring became another key pillar. Wastewater, rivers and markets were brought into the national monitoring system, allowing authorities to spot warning signs that

might otherwise go unnoticed. This broader approach acknowledged that human, animal and environmental health are closely connected.

Hospitals also received support to encourage more careful use of medicines. Thousands of health professionals participated in workshops, laboratories were upgraded, and communication between clinicians and laboratory teams improved. As a result, information is increasingly being used to guide real-world decisions rather than simply being collected and stored.

While challenges remain, Bangladesh now has stronger systems, better coordination and a clearer national strategy. Its experience shows that tackling this global threat requires more than equipment and funding. It demands cooperation, long-term commitment and the ability to turn information into action. In the fight against drug resistance, Bangladesh is demonstrating that meaningful progress is possible when institutions work together towards a common goal.

AI cracks one of biology's biggest puzzles

STAR HEALTH REPORT

Scientists have unveiled a powerful new artificial intelligence system that could dramatically speed up the search for future treatments. Developed by Biohub, the platform can explore billions of proteins – the tiny building blocks that keep our bodies functioning; and predict how they behave, interact and take shape.

For decades, discovering useful proteins has been a slow and costly process, often taking years of laboratory work. The new system changes that by allowing researchers to perform much of the early search on computers, producing promising candidates within days.

The platform combines three open tools that help scientists understand proteins, predict their shapes and uncover hidden links across living organisms. By analysing information gathered from billions of



protein records found throughout nature, the system learns patterns that have evolved over millions of years.

Researchers have already tested the technology on several targets linked to cancer and immune-related illnesses. In laboratory studies, the computer-designed proteins successfully attached to their intended targets and showed encouraging results.

Biohub says the tools will be freely available to researchers worldwide, supporting faster discovery and encouraging collaboration. Experts believe such advances could shorten the journey from scientific idea to treatment, opening new possibilities for more personalised and effective care in the future.

Same route, different risk: Understanding Hepatitis A & E

SHARMILA SAZANKA

A plate of roadside fuchka, a glass of fresh juice from a street cart, or a meal prepared with unclean water may seem harmless. Yet these everyday choices can sometimes open the door to illnesses that quietly damage one of the body's most important organs. Among them are Hepatitis A and Hepatitis E, two infections that continue to affect thousands of people in Bangladesh every year.

Both illnesses spread through contaminated food and water, making them particularly common in areas where sanitation remains a challenge. Flooding, waterlogging and poor waste management can further increase the risk, especially during the monsoon season. Although the two infections follow the same route of transmission, they do not affect everyone in the same way. Hepatitis A is more frequently seen in children and often causes a milder illness. Hepatitis E, however, is more common among adults and can become especially dangerous for pregnant women.

Once these viruses enter the body, they reach the liver and interfere with its ability to carry out essential tasks. People may experience fever, nausea, tiredness, stomach discomfort and a yellowish colour in the eyes or skin. In severe cases, the illness can become life-threatening. Reports suggest that Hepatitis E continues to claim lives in Bangladesh each year, highlighting the need for greater awareness and prevention.

Street food is an important part of Bangladeshi culture and livelihood. From chotpoti and fuchka to jhalmuri and sugarcane juice, these foods bring communities together and support thousands of vendors. The goal is not to avoid street food altogether, but to choose it wisely. Vendors who use clean water, maintain hygiene and prepare food safely can significantly reduce the risk of infection.

The good news is that prevention is simple. Drinking safe water, washing hands regularly, eating hygienically prepared food and improving sanitation can greatly lower the chances of illness. Vaccination against Hepatitis A also offers added protection. Small daily habits may seem insignificant, but they can make the difference between good health and a serious illness. In a country where food is a celebration of life, keeping it safe should be everyone's responsibility.

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A blood test for forgetfulness? Scientists edge closer to early Alzheimer's detection

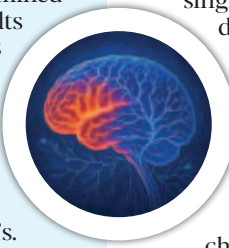
A simple blood test could one day help identify people at risk of Alzheimer's long before memory problems begin, according to new research published in The Lancet. Scientists found that certain changes in the blood may reveal early warning signs of the condition in otherwise healthy middle-aged adults.

The study examined more than 1,300 adults in the United States with an average age of 61. Researchers discovered that a small group showed higher levels of proteins linked to Alzheimer's. These individuals performed less well in tests involving memory, attention and thinking speed, and their abilities appeared to decline more quickly over time.

Experts say the findings could open the door to earlier action. Identifying people at risk before symptoms appear may encourage healthier lifestyles, including regular exercise, better sleep, avoiding smoking and addressing hearing problems. Such steps could help delay the onset of memory decline.

A separate study in the same journal found that a newer type of brain scan was more effective at detecting early changes associated with Alzheimer's than current methods. Researchers believe this could improve the identification of people most likely to develop symptoms in the future.

However, specialists caution that these tests are not yet suitable for routine community-wide screening and should be used alongside other assessments.



Why family doctors could save thousands of lives

DR IT COLONEL (RETD) MD KABIR AHMED KHAN

Bangladesh is facing a painful reminder of what happens when everyday healthcare is overlooked. A recent outbreak of measles has spread across almost all districts of the country, claiming the lives of hundreds of young children and affecting thousands more. Many of those who fell ill had missed their routine vaccinations, highlighting cracks in a system that should protect the nation's youngest citizens.

The crisis goes beyond a single disease. It reflects deeper challenges in reaching every child with essential care. Vaccination rates have slipped below the level needed to keep communities safe, leaving hundreds of thousands of children vulnerable. Crowded urban settlements, poverty, and weak follow-up systems have allowed the illness to spread quickly. The disruption caused by the COVID-19 pandemic also left many children behind, while efforts to catch up have struggled to close the gap.

Health experts say the solution

lies not only in vaccines but also in stronger community-based care. Around the world, family doctors serve as the first point of contact for healthcare. They know families personally, keep track of children's vaccinations, monitor long-term illnesses,



and help people make informed decisions about their health. Their trusted presence often makes the difference between prevention and crisis.

In Bangladesh, however, family medicine remains underdeveloped. Many communities, particularly in urban settlements and rural areas, lack regular access to a dedicated

family doctor. This gap weakens the connection between households and the health system.

Advocates are calling for major reforms, including placing trained family doctors in every community, strengthening local health centres, improving follow-up of missed vaccinations, and expanding training opportunities for future doctors. Such measures could

reduce healthcare costs, improve trust in medical advice, and help detect health threats before they become national emergencies.

As World Family Doctor Day highlights the value of compassionate care, the recent outbreak offers a clear lesson. A healthier Bangladesh will not be built only in hospitals. It will be built through strong neighbourhood healthcare, trusted family doctors, and a system that reaches every child before illness has a chance to spread.

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