

## Editorial

# Bangladesh Achieves Remarkable Milestone in Public Health: Visceral Leishmaniasis (Kala-azar) Eliminated

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*"I salute the great progress made by Bangladesh, in line with WHO guidance, in eliminating visceral leishmaniasis as a public health threat". -Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, WHO Director-General.*

In a groundbreaking achievement for public health, Bangladesh has successfully eliminated visceral leishmaniasis, a potentially fatal parasitic disease transmitted by infected sandflies.<sup>1</sup> This milestone reflects the nation's unwavering commitment to healthcare, the concerted efforts of healthcare professionals, and collaborative initiatives with international organizations. Visceral leishmaniasis, commonly known as kala-azar, poses a severe threat to public health due to its debilitating symptoms and potentially fatal consequences. Bangladesh's success in eliminating this disease underscores the effectiveness of targeted public health strategies and the dedication of the country's healthcare system.<sup>2</sup>

Visceral leishmaniasis is a neglected tropical disease caused by the *Leishmania* parasite, transmitted through the bite of infected sandflies, primarily belonging to the genus *Phlebotomus*.<sup>3</sup> The disease affects vital organs such as the spleen, liver, and bone marrow, manifesting symptoms such as prolonged fever, weight loss, enlarged spleen and liver, and anemia. If left untreated, visceral leishmaniasis can lead to severe complications and, in some cases, prove fatal. Bangladesh faced the challenge of controlling and eliminating visceral leishmaniasis, prompting the implementation of a comprehensive strategy in collaboration with international partners such as the World Health Organization (WHO) and non-governmental organizations. Bangladesh prioritized early detection through active surveillance programs, ensuring prompt treatment with antimonial drugs.<sup>4</sup> This strategy aimed to interrupt the transmission cycle and prevent further spread of the disease.

Controlling the sand fly population is crucial in preventing the transmission of the *Leishmania* parasite. Bangladesh employed various vector control measures, including the use of insecticide-treated bed nets, indoor residual spraying, and environmental management to reduce sand fly breeding sites.<sup>5</sup>

Community involvement and awareness were pivotal in disease control. Bangladesh initiated educational programs to raise awareness about the disease, its symptoms, and

preventive measures. This approach empowered individuals to actively participate in protecting themselves and their communities.<sup>6</sup>

Collaborative efforts with international organizations, notably the WHO, provided Bangladesh with technical expertise, financial support, and access to global resources. This collaboration facilitated the development and implementation of evidence-based strategies for disease control and elimination.<sup>7</sup>

Bangladesh's success in eliminating visceral leishmaniasis carries far-reaching implications, extending beyond immediate health benefits. The elimination of visceral leishmaniasis significantly improves the overall quality of life for affected individuals and their communities. Families are spared the physical, emotional, and financial burdens associated with the disease.<sup>8</sup>

The successful elimination of visceral leishmaniasis reflects the resilience and effectiveness of Bangladesh's healthcare system. It demonstrates the nation's capacity to implement effective public health measures and respond to emerging health challenges.<sup>9</sup>

Bangladesh's achievement contributes to global efforts to control and eliminate neglected tropical diseases. It serves as a model for other countries facing similar challenges, emphasizing the importance of collaborative approaches and sustained investment in public health.<sup>2</sup>

While celebrating the elimination of visceral leishmaniasis, continued vigilance is essential to prevent the reemergence of the disease. Sustained surveillance, a robust healthcare infrastructure, and ongoing community engagement are crucial components of post-elimination strategies. Bangladesh can leverage the lessons learned from this success to address other health challenges and further strengthen its healthcare system.<sup>10</sup>

Bangladesh's successful elimination of visceral leishmaniasis stands as a testament to the transformative power of determined public health efforts and collaborative initia-

tives.<sup>1</sup> This milestone not only improves the health and well-being of the nation's citizens but also contributes significantly to the global fight against neglected tropical diseases. As Bangladesh continues its journey toward sustainable health outcomes, the elimination of visceral leishmaniasis serves as a shining example of what can be accomplished through dedication, innovation, and international cooperation in the field of public health.

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