

Start production of a rapid test kit for *Helicobacter pylori* infection in Bhutan
(International Collaborative Research Program : Science and Technology Research
Partnership for Sustainable Development (SATREPS) *1)

- Development of Test kit and Certification: As a rapid diagnostic method for *H. pylori* infection, Japan and Bhutan jointly developed a stool antigen immunochromatography (ICT) kit. The Prime Minister of Bhutan indicated a policy to simplify domestic certification (use permission) by obtaining manufacturing and marketing approval obtained in Japan. Currently, an application for approval in Japan is being prepared by SATREPS FY2025 additional budget.
- Production of Test kit: Since FY2022, the Royal Centre for Disease Control (RCDC), Ministry of Health of Bhutan, has installed the equipment required for ICT kit production and has implemented human resource development. In September 2025, the establishment of production system in Bhutan was completed. This was an epoch-making event that greatly changed the medical environment in Bhutan, where most patients were unable to be diagnosed due to expensive imported test kits, and was introduced in a Bhutanese newspaper article.

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- Project title: Institutional capacity building for eliminating *H. pylori* related death
- Research period: FY2021 – FY2026
- Principal Investigator :
(Japan) YAMAOKA Yoshio (Professor, Oita University)
(Bhutan) Pem Namgyel (President, Khesar Gyalpo University of Medical Sciences of Bhutan)

*1 SATREPS is a Japanese government program to promote international joint research instructed as a collaboration between AMED and JICA with Official Development Assistance (ODA). Based on the needs of developing countries, this program aims at solving global issues with an objective of future utilization of research outcomes to both local and global society.

HOME
Bhutan develops its own testkit for H. Pylori infection

Nutan Dangi

The Royal Centre for Disease Control has started producing rapid test kits to detect *Helicobacter Pylori* (H. Pylori) infection among the population in

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Bhutan will have low-cost stool antigen test kits designed to detect H. Pylori.

H. Pylori infection is one of the leading causes of gastric cancer in the country and a major risk factor for the disease, which remains one of the deadliest, according to health officials.

With budgetary support of \$10.32 million from the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA), a machine to produce antigen test kits has been installed at the Royal Centre for Disease Control (RCDC).

The initiative falls under a project for institutional capacity building to eliminate H. pylori-related deaths.

If successful, Bhutan will be among the few countries in the region to produce its own



■ About 500 kits produced in Bhutan has been sent to Japan for international standard validation

medical diagnostic kits, boosting self reliance and strengthening the country's healthcare system.

Health officials say the locally developed kits will not only improve early detection but also reduce dependence on expensive imports.

"This is a milestone in our fight against gastric cancer," said an official. "With affordable and reliable kits made in Bhutan, we can improve early detection and save lives."

Chimed Dorji, Special Head of RCDC, said producing antigen test kits locally will reduce dependence on imported kits.

"In the long run, these test kits will not only help the government reduce costs, but Bhutan could also export them to other countries," he said.

"With the already installed machinery, we will be able to produce other kits, such as H.

uses raw materials sourced from Japan, while assembly and quality testing are fully managed by Bhutanese technicians.

A technician said the initial batch of about 100 kits produced in Bhutan has been sent to Japan for international standard validation.

"Once all the validation is complete, more kits will be produced and distributed across the country," he said.

"The quality of the kits de-

pend on their sensitivity and specificity."

One of the experts said that the goal was not just about making cheap kits, but about building Bhutan's confidence in developing health technologies adapted to the country's unique needs.

"Many people are reluctant to undergo endoscopy for H. Pylori detection, but these test kits would allow anyone to easily check their status if made available at pharmacies," she added.

However, the main challenge currently is a shortage of manpower. The country has only two trained personnel who develop the kits, and one of them is on extraordinary leave.

An official from JICA said the project is nearly complete and expressed hope that the government would continue it.

"Through this project, we have provided technical support, supplied machines, set up the lab, and trained personnel," he said. "The success will now depend on the government's continued support and stewardship."

Article introducing project achievement
(Kuensel, Bhutan's largest newspaper)