Nearly half of people with diabetes worldwide are unaware they have the disease, Rwanda Biomedical Center (RBC) warned, citing a recent global study.

The research, conducted by Lauryn Stafford at the Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation at the University of Washington, and released in September 2025, found that 44% of people with diabetes globally do not know they have it. The study also showed that many undiagnosed cases are among young adults, highlighting the growing risk of the disease in younger populations.

RBC officials said early detection is critical to prevent serious complications, including heart disease, kidney damage, nerve impairment, vision loss, and reduced mobility.

“Knowing early gives individuals the opportunity to manage the disease and reduce the risk of long-term health problems,” RBC said.

Diabetes is a condition in which blood sugar levels rise above normal, caused by genetic factors, lifestyle choices, or changes in diet and activity levels. RBC recommends preventive measures such as eating a balanced diet rich in vegetables and fruits, engaging in daily exercise, avoiding alcohol and tobacco, and maintaining a healthy body weight.

Common symptoms include frequent urination, excessive thirst, unusual hunger, unexplained weight loss, persistent fatigue, and blurred vision. Health authorities urge Rwandans to get tested regularly, especially if they notice these warning signs.

Globally, the International Diabetes Federation (IDF) projects that by 2050, more than 1.3 billion people will be living with diabetes. According to the World Health Organization, diabetes caused 1.5 million deaths worldwide in 2019, making it one of the leading causes of death globally.

In Rwanda, IDF data indicates that 4.5% of the population, roughly 297,000 people, had diabetes in 2021. RBC emphasized that public awareness campaigns, early detection, and healthy lifestyle choices are key to reducing the disease’s impact in the country.

“Regular screenings and healthy habits can save lives,” RBC said, urging individuals, families, and communities to take proactive steps in preventing and managing diabetes.

The findings highlight the urgent need for national education campaigns and access to healthcare services to address the growing burden of diabetes both in Rwanda and globally.