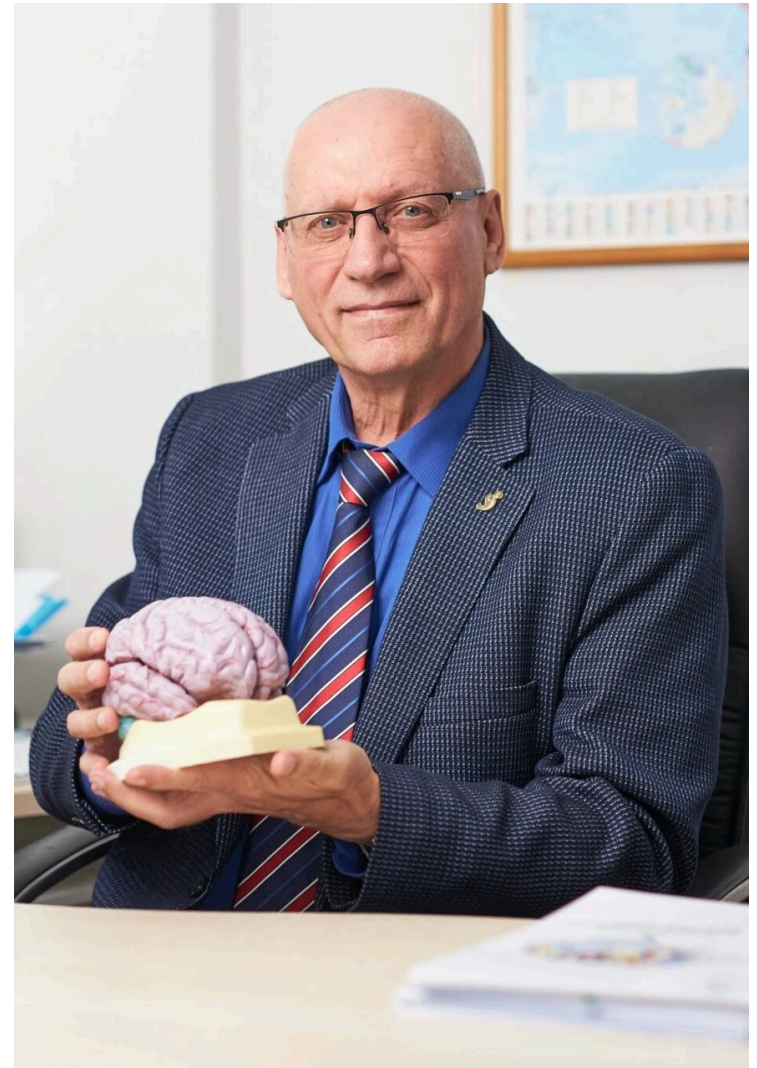


Health

## The world's number one expert points out the reason why young Vietnamese people have a stroke

**Bich HueXia Dan** Thursday, 10/4/2025 10:08 (GMT+7)

The number of strokes in young people in Vietnam is increasing rapidly, leaving heavy consequences. According to Prof. Valery Feigin, one of the causes comes from an unhealthy lifestyle.



Prof. Valery Feigin, 70, is the Director of the National Institute of Stroke and Applied Neuroscience (NISAN) of the University of Technology Aukland (New Zealand). He is a pioneer in scientific research on stroke, cardiovascular disease, diabetes and memory impairment.

Having studied for more than 40 years, Prof. Feigin is the author of more than 800 academic publications, 12 notebooks, 24 books and 4 patents.

He is among the top 1% of scientists with the most cited research in the world in 2018, 2020, 2021 and 2022. According to *Web of Science*, 1 of his research is cited every 12 minutes.

In a conversation with *Knowledge - Znews*, Prof. Feigin analyzed the increasingly youthful stroke situation in Vietnam, and at the same time offered specific solutions to halve the number of cases in the future.

## Stroke rates of concern in young people

- How do you assess the increase in stroke among young people globally as well as in Vietnam?

- The overall stroke rate is on a downward trend, but the past decade has seen a significant increase in stroke cases among young people, including in Viet Nam.

Data from the Global Burden of Disease (GBD) Study shows an alarming rate of stroke in people under the age of 70 – a group I call the working-age population. About 53% of all strokes occur in this group, and the majority are in young people. Stroke is no longer just a disease of the elderly, marking a major epidemiological shift from 20-30 years ago.

This shows that we are facing a new public health challenge. Without timely interventions, the rate of stroke among young people may continue to rise, leading to many economic and social consequences.

- *In your opinion, what factors are contributing to the increase in the number of strokes in young people?*

- One of the main causes is an unhealthy lifestyle, with sedentary conditions, unscientific eating and hypertension increasingly common among young people. This is the leading risk factor for stroke, especially when not controlled in time.

The abuse of stimulants such as drugs and amphetamines is also alarming. These substances cause direct damage to the central nervous system, increasing the risk of stroke, especially cerebral hemorrhagic stroke due to increased pressure in the cerebrovascular system.

## **Stroke is no longer just a disease of the elderly**

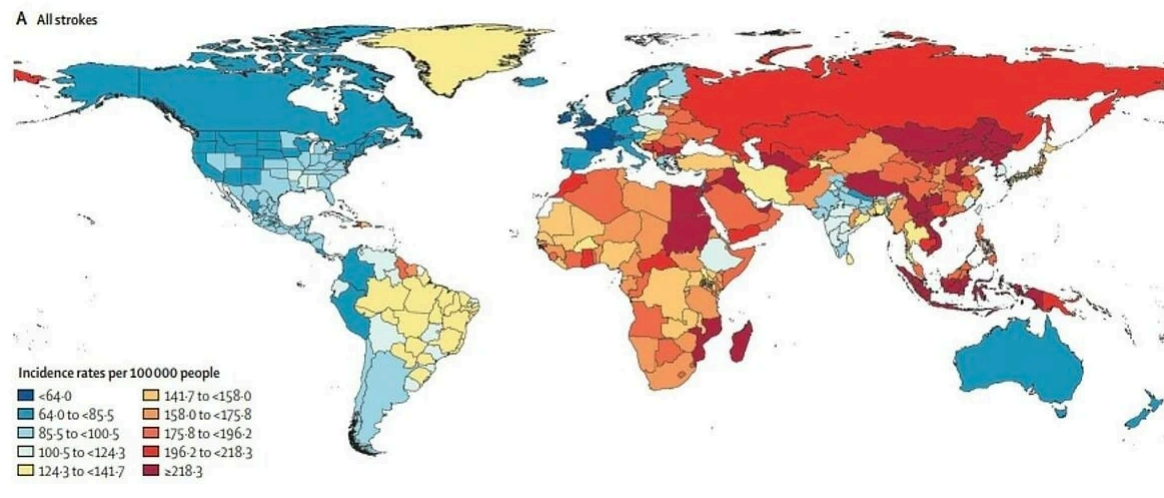
**Prof. Valery Feigin**

In addition, the increase in fast food consumption in low- and middle-income countries is leading to overweight and obesity among young people. This is a serious problem, because being overweight and obese not only increases the risk of stroke but also causes other

chronic diseases such as diabetes, dyslipidemia, cardiovascular and cancer.

Even children are now in the risk group, when many children have appeared signs of metabolic syndrome very early.

Notably, the current initial stroke prevention strategies have not been as effective as expected. The lack of appropriate health education programs, along with limited access to health care in some areas, makes the management of risk factors such as hypertension, diabetes, or dyslipidemia not fully implemented.



Map of the estimated stroke rate per 100,000 people of countries around the world, Vietnam is among the countries with the darkest red.  
Photo: *Lancet*.

- Why do you think that the initial prevention strategy has not been as effective as expected?

- Most young people miss the opportunity to prevent stroke early because they are assessed to have a low cardiovascular risk, below the threshold for intervention, although there are still major risk factors such as smoking or high blood pressure.

For example, a 40-year-old man who smokes and has high blood pressure may not be classified as high-risk under the current model, leading to the neglect of timely preventive measures, even though high blood pressure is a strong independent risk factor.

The current strategy focuses too much on the high-cardiovascular risk group, omitting young people at potential risk, causing an imbalance in risk management. In addition, some health systems do not pay enough attention to independent stroke risk factors such as smoking and high blood pressure in young people.

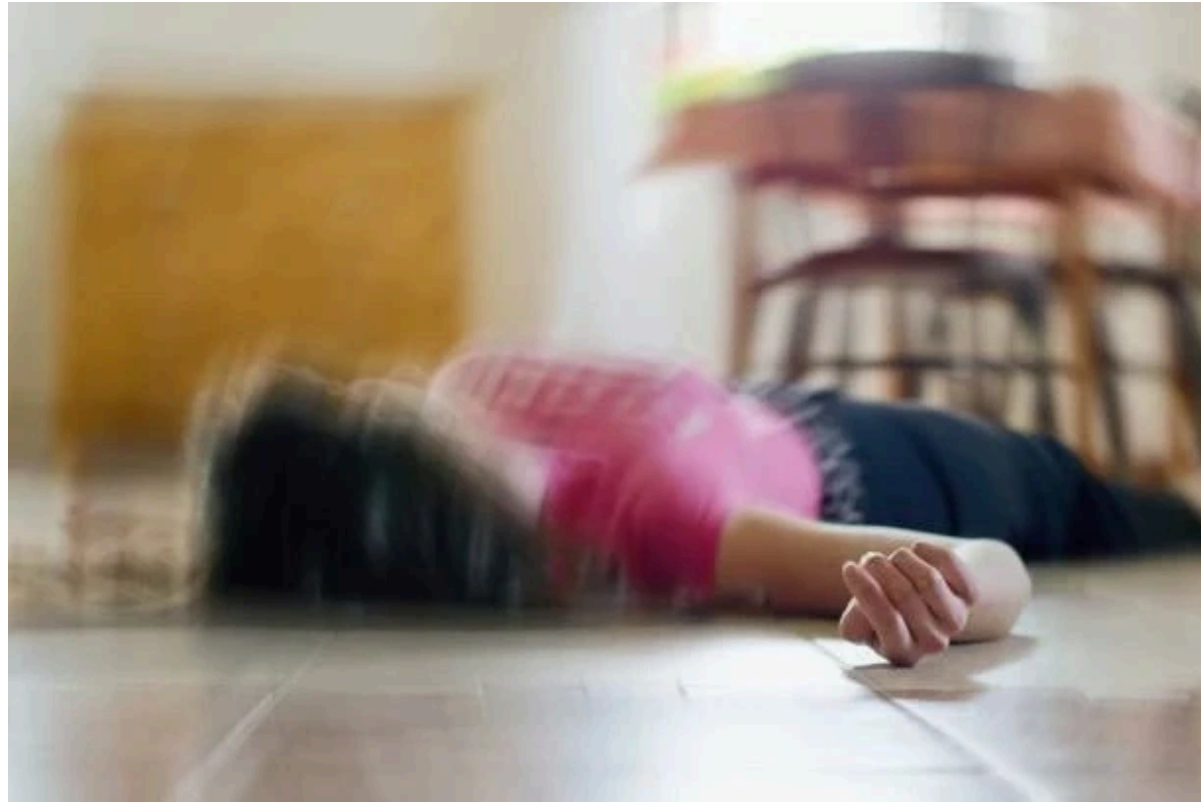
Until recently, there were not many evidence-based digitization tools to support effective stroke prevention. Currently, only one validated tool is the PreventS-MD software, developed and provided by our research team at Auckland University of Technology for deployment globally, including Vietnam. This requires changing assessment models and prevention strategies to ensure every potentially at-risk individual is adequately addressed.

- Hypertension is considered a key factor in stroke prevention. However, in Vietnam, hypertension and smoking are still common and difficult to control!

-Accurate. This is not only happening in Vietnam but also a general trend in many other countries. One of the main reasons is that people who are assessed as low-risk are often subjective, not taking measures to reduce their risk, because they think they are still "safe".

Hypertension is a major risk factor for stroke, but in Vietnam, many young people with this disease are not diagnosed or treated in time. The lack of awareness of routine health check-ups, along with unhealthy lifestyles such as high-salt diets, lack of physical activity and alcohol use, is significantly increasing the incidence of hypertension.

As for smoking, this is still a big problem. Although tobacco harm prevention campaigns have made some progress, tobacco use, especially among young people, is still very popular. Not only do cigarettes directly damage blood vessels, but they also interact with other risk factors such as hypertension, creating a dangerous spiral that increases the risk of stroke many times.



Stroke is the leading cause of death and disability in Vietnam, according to Prof. Feigin. Photo: Adobe Stock.

- In your opinion, is there any feasible solution to solve this problem?

- We have proposed and received consensus from the World Stroke Organization that anyone at risk of stroke or cardiovascular disease, whether low, moderate or high, should receive preventive interventions. Classifying "low risk" or "medium risk" can create a false sense of security, leading to subjectivity in taking precautions.

It is worth noting that 80% of strokes and myocardial infarctions occur in people in low- or intermediate-risk groups. This suggests that, although the risk is assessed at a low level, when combined

**Vietnam records an average of 200,000 strokes per year.**

with factors such as an unhealthy lifestyle, uncontrolled hypertension, or smoking, the risk of stroke is still significantly increased.

**This is a very alarming number**

**Prof. Valery Feigin**

A possible solution is to adopt a more universal prevention strategy, rather than focusing only on high-risk groups. People should be encouraged to have regular health checkups, manage risk factors such as blood pressure, cholesterol and weight well, and make lifestyle changes to minimize potential risks.

## **Solving the problem of stroke in Vietnam**

- What do you think about the fact that Vietnam records an average of 200,000 strokes per year?

- This is a very alarming number, and we are working on it in the hope of reducing it to 100,000 cases. For comparison, New Zealand is a small country, with only 5 million people, about 10,000 to 11,000 new strokes every year. Meanwhile, Vietnam has 200,000 cases with a population of about 100 million people. The rates between the two countries are relatively similar. However, because the population of Vietnam is much younger than New Zealand, when adjusted for age, the stroke rate in Vietnam is 5 times higher.

In Vietnam, stroke is the leading cause of death and long-term disability, creating a great medical and economic burden. If not treated in time, patients may suffer from hemiplegia, aphasia or cognitive impairment, profoundly affecting their quality of life.



Speaking to *Knowledge - Znews*, Prof. Valery Feigin said that stroke in young people, especially in Vietnam, is often related to lifestyle and lack of control of risk factors.

Although prioritized by the Ministry of Health, in order to halve the number of strokes per year, Vietnam needs to synchronize measures, from raising public awareness, promoting early screening and prevention, and investing in facilities and treatment capacity.

- What can we do to reduce stroke rates in young populations?

- I had a very positive working session with the Ministry of Health. We are proposing a comprehensive strategy that combines existing solutions in Vietnam, such as the stroke awareness campaign, with new prevention methods. This is a breakthrough approach, aimed at reducing the risk of stroke, including in the younger population.



Stroke in young people is often related to lifestyle and lack of control of risk factors. Therefore, awareness campaigns should focus on educating the public about the role of maintaining a healthy lifestyle, reducing smoking, drinking, and controlling blood pressure. At the same time, these programs need to help people recognize the signs of stroke early to promptly access medical care.

We expect that, if these strategies are implemented synchronously on a national scale, the stroke rate in Vietnam can be reduced by 50%. This is an ambitious but feasible goal if there is close cooperation between the authorities and active participation of the community.