



Fact sheet EURO/02/06
Copenhagen, Rome, Vienna 26 June 2006

Matching the lowest injury mortality rate could save half a million lives per year in Europe

In a new paper published in the *Lancet*¹ and a new publication of the WHO Regional Office for Europe,² Regional Office experts assess the burden of injuries in the WHO European Region.³ Every year, injuries kill some 800 000 people (accounting for 8.3% of all deaths in Europe), an average of nearly 2 200 per day or 90 per hour. For every death, injuries send an estimated 30 people to hospital and 300 others to hospital emergency departments for outpatient treatment. Nevertheless, two out of three of these deaths, and most non-fatal injuries, could be prevented.

Many cost-effective strategies exist for preventing injuries. If all countries in the Region had the same death rate from injuries as the countries with the lowest rates, some 500 000 lives could be saved each year.

This is the picture emerging from the publication *Injuries and violence in Europe. Why they matter and what can be done*, which the WHO Regional Office for Europe is launching at the 1st European Conference on Injury Prevention and Safety Promotion, taking place in Vienna, Austria on 25–27 June 2006. Because action to stem the injuries epidemic is needed from a variety of sectors, this book identifies unique opportunities to improve health through a pioneering multisectoral approach driven by the health sector.

The book documents the magnitude of the problem and the key interventions available to address it. It aims at supporting policy-makers, health-sector professionals and civil-society organizations in making the case for injury prevention, advocating safety and working with other sectors to develop preventive plans and action.

¹ Sethi D et al. Reducing inequalities from injuries in Europe. *Lancet*, 2006, 367 (Early online publication: <http://www.thelancet.com/journals/eop>).

² Sethi D et al. *Injuries and violence in Europe. Why they matter and what can be done*. Copenhagen, WHO Regional Office for Europe, 2006 (www.euro.who.int/InformationSources/Publications/Catalogue/20060601_1).

³ The WHO European Region includes 52 Member States and covers over 870 million inhabitants.

Opportunities for prevention

Injuries can be either unintentional (caused by road-traffic crashes, poisoning, drowning, falls and fires) or intentional (caused by violence directed at oneself or others). Both types combined are the leading cause of death in people under the age of 45 years. In particular, injuries kill 28 000 children under 15 (accounting for 36% of all deaths in this age group) per year.

Nevertheless, rates of death from injury vary more widely between poorer and wealthier countries in the WHO European Region than in any other WHO region in the world. People living in low-and-middle-income countries are nearly four times more likely to die from injury than those in high-income countries. In addition, regardless of a country's wealth, children, older people and the poorest people have a higher risk of injury death; in particular, socioeconomically deprived children have 3–4 times the risk of children from better-off families.

Much can be gained by adapting and transferring the experience of the best performing countries. First, injury prevention should be acknowledged as a society's responsibility, a great change from the view that assigns responsibility solely to individuals. Some risk factors, such as alcohol consumption and poverty, are common to all types of injury. Addressing these would produce the greatest benefits for people's health.

Interventions that save lives are very good value for money: they can help reduce the annual Region-wide cost of both fatal and non-fatal injuries (estimated in the range of €1–6 billion and €80–290 billion, respectively). For example, each €1 spent on various protective measures can yield great savings:

smoke alarms	€69
child safety seats	€32
universal licensing of handguns	€79
home visits and education of parents about child abuse	€19

The health sector can play a central role in leading a multisectoral approach to injury prevention, not limiting its activities to treatment and rehabilitation. It can engage and support other sectors in injury prevention by providing evidence on the burden of death and disease, shedding light on the risk factors, identifying effective interventions and promoting action.

Figures on injuries in the WHO European Region

Unintentional injuries are responsible for two thirds of injury deaths in the WHO European Region per year.

- Road-traffic injuries kill 127 000 people (55% are aged 15–44 years) and injure or disable 2.4 million.
- Poisoning causes 110 000 deaths, with alcohol use responsible for up to 70%, especially in the eastern part of the Region.
- Drowning results in 38 000 deaths and is the third leading cause of death in children aged 5–14 years.
- Falls kill 80 000 people, with the highest mortality in those over 80 years.
- Fires cause 24 000 deaths, and burns are a major cause of disfigurement.

Violence is responsible for about 257 000 deaths per year (equivalent to 32% of all deaths following injury) in the Region.

- Self-inflicted injuries are the leading cause of death from injury, with 164 000 victims a year.
- Interpersonal violence kills 73 000 people; for every death there are 20–40 visits to hospital. Underreporting of violence understates the extent of the problem.
- Child abuse and homicide annually cause 1 500 deaths in children under 15. The consequences of abuse may manifest themselves later in victims' lives.
- Violence by young people is the third leading cause of death, with over 12 000 victims per year.
- Intimate partner violence accounts for 40–70% of all murders of women.
- Sexual violence is reported by 1 in 4 women and 1 in 20 men in their lifetime.
- Some 4–6% of elderly people living at home are abused.

For more information contact:

TECHNICAL INFORMATION

Ms Francesca Racioppi
Scientist, Accidents, Transport and Health
WHO Regional Office for Europe
Via Francesco Crispi 10, I-00187 Rome, Italy
Tel.: +39 06 4877545. Fax: +39 06 4877599
E-mail: fr@ecr.euro.who.int

Dr Dinesh Sethi
Technical Officer, Accidents, Transport and Health
WHO Regional Office for Europe
Via Francesco Crispi 10, I-00187 Rome, Italy
Tel.: +39 06 4877526. Fax: +39 06 4877599
E-mail: din@ecr.euro.who.int

Dr Inge Baumgarten
Scientist, Violence Prevention
WHO Regional Office for Europe
Scherfigsvej 8, DK-2100 Copenhagen Ø, Denmark
Tel.: +45 3917 1502. Fax: +45 3917 1892
E-mail: iba@euro.who.int

PRESS INFORMATION

Ms Liuba Negru
Press and Media Relations Officer
WHO Regional Office for Europe
Scherfigsvej 8, DK-2100 Copenhagen Ø, Denmark
Tel.: +45 3917 1344. Fax: +45 3917 1880
E-mail: ln@euro.who.int

Ms Cristiana Salvi
Technical Officer, Communication and Advocacy
WHO Regional Office for Europe
Via Francesco Crispi 10, I-00187 Rome, Italy
Tel.: +39 06 4877543. Mobile: +39 348 0192305
Fax: +39 06 4877599. E-mail: csa@ecr.euro.who.int

All press materials can be found on the Regional Office web site (<http://www.euro.who.int/mediacentre>).