

Press release

Amsterdam, April 3, 2008

Injury epidemic in EU leaves trail of destruction

Injury is one of the biggest health threats facing Europe today. It is an epidemic of huge proportions silently raging through Europe killing hundreds of thousands and disabling millions. Recent facts and figures can be found in the newly released report "Injuries in the European Union- Statistics Summary 2003 – 2005"(1).

Every two minutes someone dies of a fatal accident in the EU and another 228 people are injured.

With about 250,000 fatalities each year in the European Union, injuries represent the fourth major cause of death in the EU. Only cardiovascular diseases, cancer and diseases of the respiratory system claim more lives.

60 million people in the EU receive medical treatment each year as a result of an accident or injury. This is more than the whole population of Italy.

What we consider to be safe and enjoyable locations can actually turn into potential death traps.

While the magnitude of the injury epidemic is alarming, the location of the vast majority of injuries may cause even more concern. The reality is that EU citizens are more at risk of being injured either at home or during leisure time activities than in any other location. 80% of all injuries happen in other locations than roads or workplaces.

This is especially bad news for young children and elderly who spend a lot of time at home. Bathrooms, staircases and kitchens are some of the injury hotspots where, in particular, children and elderly suffer a traumatic injury. For both age groups their vulnerability is expressed by the trail of destruction following an injury. For children, an injury can lead to a crippling disability and for more than 100,000 elderly people annually, the tragic consequences and complications of an injury eventually result in death.

For children, adolescents and young adults injuries are the leading cause of death. Yet in many EU Member States the proven safety measures in the areas of safety at home and during leisure time have not been readily adopted and implemented. A recently adopted Council Recommendation is helping to place the problem higher on the public health agenda (2).

Data to guide prevention

In order to prevent injuries we need to understand what causes them. Detailed injury data makes it possible to develop prevention measures, to guide action, monitor injury trends, prioritise issues, steer policies and evaluate the success of interventions designed to reduce injuries. To be able to prevent injuries effectively it is important not only to know how many fractures or head injuries have occurred, but also where, when, how, to whom and hopefully also why?

Mortality and hospital statistics are available in most Member States, but do not contain sufficient information about the causes of injuries. In order to guide targeted prevention, an injury surveillance system based on Accident and Emergency departments from selected Member State hospitals has been set up. It is currently operational in twelve Member States and should be expanded to all Member States in the forthcoming years. Data are accessible at the EU Injury Data Base (IDB) homepage. (3)

EU former Health Commissioner Markos Kyprianou has backed the improvements of the Community-wide reporting system on injuries. "It is important to highlight the great toll that injury takes on the European Union and Member States. The development of a European Injury Data Base based on national injury surveillance systems complies with the recently adopted Council Recommendation on Injury Prevention and Safety Promotion. Data information provided by the IDB will assist the European Commission and Member States to reduce the impact of both unintentional injuries as well as violence and self-harm."

European Association for Injury Prevention and Safety Promotion

Rupert Kisser, the head of the IDB Programme based at the Kuratorium für Verkehrssicherheit in Vienna, and Chairman of EuroSafe reinforces this: "The huge differences in injury risks between Member States illustrate what can be achieved. We estimate that more than 100,000 lives could be saved annually, if every country in the European Union provided the same level of safety as the Netherlands, the country with the lowest level. Our data report provides information about national differences in injury risk, information about risky social settings, physical environments, products and services, activities and lifestyles. We all have a commitment to protect those most vulnerable in Europe - our children and our elderly. This injury epidemic cannot continue to leave such a trail of destruction behind. Never before, has the political climate been so favourable – now is the time to take action to prevent injuries." (5)

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A fact sheet on Injuries in the EU (4) is also available which serves as a summary of the report.

Notes to the journalist

1. The report, 'Injuries in the European Union- Statistics Summary 2003 – 2005' has been compiled by the Austrian Road Safety Board (KfV) and the European Association for Injury Prevention and Safety Promotion (EuroSafe), with support and co-funding from the European Commission (Public Health Programme). In this report injury data from different information sources has been combined to get a comprehensive view of injuries in the following domains: transport, work place, home, leisure and sport. The report can be downloaded at:

<http://www.eurosafe.eu.com/csi/eurosafe2006.nsf/wwwVwContent/I3reports-1.htm>

2. In 2007, the European Council adopted a Recommendation on Injury Prevention and Safety Promotion. The Recommendation invites Member States to make better use of existing injury data and develop national injury surveillance and reporting systems; and set up national plans for injury prevention that include safety promotion in education and professional training that can be guided by national injury data. The Recommendation has identified the following seven priority areas in which injury data and specifically the IDB will support and provide critical information to address these issues: Safety of children and adolescents, Safety of elderly citizens, Safety of vulnerable road users, Prevention of sports injuries, Prevention of injuries caused by products and services, Prevention of self-harm, and the Prevention of interpersonal violence. The Recommendation is available at:

<http://www.eurosafe.eu.com/csi/eurosafe2006.nsf/wwwVwContent/I3councilrecommendation.htm>

3. The EU Injury Database is available at: <https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/idb/>

4. The fact sheet on Injuries in the EU is available at:

<http://www.eurosafe.eu.com/csi/eurosafe2006.nsf/wwwVwContent/I3reports-1.htm>

5. Please see page 2 of the fact sheet on Injuries in the EU for a breakdown per country of the lives that can be saved in the EU per year.



The IDB is part of EuroSafe's Injury Data programme and is coordinated by the Austrian Kuratorium für Verkehrssicherheit. The IDB is supported and co-funded by the European Commission.