

**Note for the Media WHO/Bulletin**  
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### **Stricter penalties save lives on the roads**

Making speeding, alcohol-impaired driving and reckless driving a serious criminal offence can significantly reduce road traffic injuries and deaths, according to a study published in the June issue of the *Bulletin of the World Health Organization*.

The study, carried out in Spain, found that the introduction of stricter penalties for these serious road offences had the greatest effect on reducing road traffic injuries in young male drivers, particularly motorcycle riders. The fear of a prison sentence and a possible criminal record was a strong deterrent to risky driving behaviour.

The study shows that, after the new law was introduced in 2007, there was a 14% reduction of risk in serious road traffic injuries among male drivers (who make up 80% of drivers involved in injury collisions) and a 30% reduction in risk of serious or fatal injuries in male motorcycle riders on rural roads. The new law had less of an effect on reducing collisions among female drivers, possibly because women tend to be more compliant road users.

“Strict laws alone are not enough to deter road users from risky behaviour,” says co-author Ana Novoa, from the Agència de Salut Pública de Barcelona. “They must be rigorously enforced and generate awareness and fear of the consequences of breaking the law.”

The World Health Organization (WHO) estimates that road traffic injuries kill nearly 1.3 million people every year. "Legislation is a very important factor in reducing road traffic deaths caused by speeding and drink-driving yet only 15% of countries have comprehensive laws," says Dr Margie Peden, WHO Coordinator of Unintentional Injury Prevention. "The Decade of Action for Road Safety (2011–2020) provides all countries the impetus to further drive down their road traffic fatalities by implementing good road safety practices, including strong legislation."

Read the paper here:

<http://www.who.int/bulletin/volumes/89/6/10-082180/en/index.html>

For more information on WHO's work on road traffic injuries:

[http://www.who.int/violence\\_injury\\_prevention/road\\_traffic/en/](http://www.who.int/violence_injury_prevention/road_traffic/en/)

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The *Bulletin of the World Health Organization* is one of the world's leading public health journals. It is the flagship periodical of WHO, with a special focus on developing countries. Articles are peer-reviewed and are independent of WHO guidelines. Abstracts are now available in the six official languages of the United Nations.

Further items in this month's issue include:

- Fetal alcohol syndrome: dashed hope, damaged lives
- From awareness to action: an interview with Regina Rabinovich from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation
- Do micronutrients in pregnancy improve infant survival?
- Surgery: the neglected stepchild of global health
- Gaps in access to drugs for chronic diseases
- Great leap in hospital births in China: from 44% to 95% in 20 years
- The many causes of anaemia in African children

The June issue table of contents can be found at:

<http://www.who.int/bulletin/volumes/89/6/en/index.html>

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