4 MAY, 2017: GENEVA —Managing speed, a new report by the World Health Organization (WHO), suggests that excessive or inappropriate speed contributes to one in every three road traffic fatalities worldwide. Measures to address speed prevent road traffic deaths and injuries, and make populations healthier and cities more sustainable.

Around 1.25 million people die every year on the world’s roads. Studies indicate that typically 40-50% of drivers go over posted speed limits. Drivers who are male, young and under the influence of alcohol are more likely to be involved in speed-related crashes. Road traffic crashes remain the number one cause of death among young people aged 15–29 years. They are estimated to cost countries from 3-5% of GDP and push many families into poverty.

Yet only 47 countries of the world follow good practice on one of the main speed management measures, namely implementing an urban speed limit of 50 km/h or less and allowing local authorities to reduce these limits further on roads around schools, residences and businesses.

“Speed is at the core of the global road traffic injury problem,” notes WHO Director-General Dr Margaret Chan. “If countries were to address just this key risk, they would soon reap the rewards of safer roads, both in terms of lives saved and increases in walking and cycling, with profound and lasting effects on health.”

Speed management measures include:

- building or modifying roads to include features that calm traffic, such as roundabouts and speed bumps;
- establishing speed limits appropriate to the function of each road;
- enforcing speed limits through the use of manual and automated controls;
- installing in-vehicle technologies in new cars, such as intelligent speed assistance and autonomous emergency braking;
- raising awareness about the dangers of speed.

Road traffic fatality rates are nearly three times lower in Europe compared to Africa. Countries that have had the most success in drastically reducing rates of road traffic death and injury in recent decades – Netherlands, Sweden, and the United Kingdom among them – are those that have addressed the issue holistically. They have prioritized safe speed as one of four components of the safe system approach, along with safe roads and roadsides, safe vehicles, and safe road users.

Within countries, municipal leaders have greatly contributed to a growing movement – often instigated at local level – to transform cities into more liveable places for all. By reducing speed and improving safety, their populations benefit from the added advantages of increases in walking and cycling and reductions in air and noise pollution. Such actions, in turn, have positive health benefits on rates of cardiovascular disease, cancer, diabetes and other noncommunicable diseases.

Managing speed was released in advance of the Fourth UN Global Road Safety Week, 8-14 May 2017. The week and its related campaign “Save Lives: #SlowDown” draw attention to the
dangers of speed and the measures which should be put in place to address this leading risk for road traffic deaths and injuries.

Among hundreds of other events feature the following:

- Slow Down Days in Belarus, Belgium, Benin, Botswana, Colombia, India, Malaysia, Nepal, Qatar, Spain, Trinidad and Tobago, Tunisia and Viet Nam;
- campaigns around schools in Brazil, Cameroon, China, Fiji, Gambia, Jordan, Morocco, Romania, South Africa and Uganda;
- activities involving parliamentarians in Armenia, Australia, Myanmar, Republic of Moldova, Thailand, Ukraine and the United Kingdom;
- symposia in Montenegro, Nigeria, Philippines, Poland and Sierra Leone;
- vigils for road traffic victims in Ireland and Mauritius.

The UN Week is a unique advocacy opportunity that contributes to achievement of the road safety-related Sustainable Development Goal targets 3.6 and 11.2. On the occasion of the UN Week, WHO will also release Save LIVES: a road safety technical package, which details 22 key evidence-based measures considered most likely to impact on road traffic deaths and injuries, including a number linked to managing speed.

RELATED LINKS

Managing speed and related infographic in several languages

Fourth UN Global Road Safety Week
https://www.unroadsafetyweek.org/en/home

Speed management: a road safety manual for decision-makers and practitioners

For further information:

Laura Sminkey
WHO Department for Management of Noncommunicable Diseases, Disability, Violence and Injury Prevention
Telephone: +41 22 791 4547
Mobile: +41 79 249 3520
E-mail: sminkeyl@who.int

Paul Garwood
WHO Department of Communications
Telephone: +41 22 791 1578
Mobile: +41 79 603 72 94
Email: garwoodp@who.int