Deaths from injuries are projected to rise from 5.1 million in 1990 to 8.4 million in 2020 – with increases in road traffic injuries as a major cause for this rise. Currently deaths from road traffic injuries account for 2.5% of the global mortality affecting all age groups.

Road traffic injuries are the 9th leading cause of burden of disease worldwide and are projected to jump to 3rd position by the year 2020.

Although the number of motor vehicles per population is much higher in high income countries, the death toll due to road traffic injuries is highest in low and middle income countries, representing 90% of all these deaths in 2000.

The economic costs of traffic injuries are enormous. Over 50% of road traffic fatalities worldwide involve young adults aged 15-44 years corresponding to the most economically productive segment of the population. In addition, road traffic injuries have major health and social impacts.

Key factors responsible for road traffic injuries are preventable

- Driving under influence of alcohol
- Speeding
- Under-utilization of safety devices such as: seat belts, child restraints and helmets
- Poor road planning
- Unsafe vehicle design
- Poor implementation of road safety measures

For men aged 15-44 years, road traffic injuries rank second to HIV/AIDS as the leading cause of ill health and premature death worldwide.

Role of public health

- To advocate for road traffic injury prevention
- To examine the health, social and economic impacts of road traffic injuries
- To collect and disseminate data on fatal and non-fatal road traffic injuries
- To examine risk and protective factors
- To ensure appropriate care and rehabilitation of all injured persons
- To promote road safety and safer road user behaviour
- To monitor and evaluate road safety interventions
- To promote a multi-sectoral approach to prevention of road traffic injuries.