Countries that take simple measures to prevent road traffic collisions not only save countless lives but also make substantial savings that translate into major economic benefits for society as a whole, according to a study published this month in the international public health journal, the *Bulletin of the World Health Organization*
.

The study looked at the effect of measures taken in Catalonia, Spain, between 2000 and 2010, including increased police surveillance and use of fines, improving road infrastructures and, from 2006, the introduction of legal measures to fine reoffenders with a penalty point system and to turn severe road violations into criminal offences.

“These measures resulted in a 57% reduction in road deaths between 2000 and 2010 as well as substantial reductions in traffic collisions, hospitalizations and sick leave all of which, in economic terms, translated into about 18 000 million euros (US$ 23 000 million) saved,” said lead author Anna García-Altés, senior Health Economist at the Catalan Agency for Health Information, Assessment and Quality in Barcelona, Spain.

“The vast majority – 97% – of these cost savings corresponded to indirect costs, including the loss of productivity due to hospitalization, sick leave of the injured and their carers, or death,” García-Altés said. “The remaining 3% covers the direct costs of road traffic collisions, including the cost of specialized care, adaptation to disability and hospital care.”

Injuries from traffic collisions are a major cause of premature death and disability worldwide. They cause around 1.3 million deaths every year and leave between 20 and 50 million people injured, many of them with permanent disabilities, according to *The Global status report on road safety* . If current trends continue, road crashes – the tenth leading cause of death –are predicted to become the fifth leading cause of death by 2030.

“Globally, countries spend about 1–3% of their GDP on road traffic injury prevention, and such investment is vital to making their roads safer,” said Dr Margaret Peden, a road safety expert at the World Health Organization (WHO). “This study shows that there is not only a major return on investments in road safety in terms of lives saved and disability avoided, but also substantial cost savings for society as a whole.”

“This is an important piece of work, as there are few economic evaluations of road safety policies and interventions. It contributes to a growing body of evidence that can help inform the 100 countries committed to reducing road crashes as part of the Decade of Action for Road Safety (2011–2020),” Peden said, referring to the United Nations initiative launched in 2011.

In 2009, WHO published *The Global status report on road safety* , the first broad assessment of the road safety situation in 178 countries, using data drawn from a standardized survey. The results suggest that road safety laws need to be comprehensive and their enforcement should be strengthened in many countries. An update of the report is due out this year.

Read the article here: http://www.who.int/entity/bulletin/volumes/91/1/12-110072.pdf

Also in this month's issue:

- Demand for medical devices driven by emerging economies
- Interview: Wikipedia's struggle to create free but reliable health information
- Drug-resistant tuberculosis and its risk factors in Belarus
- Vaccines : getting the wrapping right
- Mental illness and the global response to noncommunicable diseases
- Measuring the effects of vitamin A supplementation in Ghana
- Primary health care provision in Chinese villages

****

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.

The January issue table of contents can be found at: http://www.who.int/bulletin/volumes/91/1

The complete contents of the *Bulletin*, since 1948, is available free to all readers worldwide through PubMed Central, available at: http://www.pubmedcentral.nih.gov/tocrender.fcgi?journal=522&action=archive