

Children –vulnerable road users

Children are vulnerable road users. Road trauma is the leading cause of death and the second most frequent cause of hospitalization for children aged under 14. In Zambia, according to available statistics, these make about 50 per cent of fatality statistics.

To help children and young people (0 to 20 year olds) remain safer on the roads, the Road Transport and Safety Agency (RTSA) through its Education and Publicity Unit School, supported by the Ministry of Education, provides information, resources and professional development to schools.

This has been achieved through the establishment of road safety schools. Currently there are 901 road safety clubs spread in a number of schools throughout the country. The RTSA has partnered with TOTAL Zambia in an initiative and program to help parents, community groups and schools to deliver best practice road safety education through the provision of tool kits to schools.

Road Safety clubs have been identified as an early intervention program that sets the scene for developing positive road safety attitudes and behaviors in young children.

The Road Transport and Safety Agency has also been supporting schools through road safety clubs by supplying them with best practice resource that describes what effective road safety education is. For instance school manuals for learners and trainers provide a tool for teachers to help them plan and implement road safety strategies in their schools.

The RTSA also provides free professional learning seminars for teachers affiliated to these road safety clubs. These seminars focus on road safety issues for children and young people, curriculum resources for classroom programs, and action planning. The seminars are also being used as evaluation tools to assess the impact of these programmes.

Traveling among these young road users by car now account for at least half of all distances travelled by 10-14 year olds and this shift is believed to account for the fact that more children are killed today as car passengers than in any other form of transport.

Zambia's law requires drivers to ensure all passengers who are travelling in their vehicles are appropriately restrained in approved child restraints or seat belts. But in Zambia this law is not adhered to as much as it is in other countries.

Children's vulnerability as road users is centered around their cognitive and perceptual abilities which are not fully developed until young adulthood. It is therefore important for parents and guardians to be alive to the following factors.

Children are at risk on the roads because they:

- are small and can't see over parked cars
- can't be seen easily by drivers
- are energetic and have trouble stopping at corners
- have difficulty telling where sounds are coming from and may expect traffic to come from the wrong direction. This is true until the age of 11 or 12
- have trouble judging the speed of cars reliably

- tend to focus on what is in front of them
- may behave differently when they are out with other children, forgetting about traffic
- may freeze if they find themselves in the path of a car, rather than jump out of the way
- require specially fitted restraints which must be altered as they grow.

Children are passengers, pedestrians, cyclists and users of small wheeled vehicles like skateboards. Their road safety skills change over time, and they face different dangers at different points in their development.

Most crashes involving child pedestrians and vehicles are the result of errors made by the children. Children under 10 do not have the necessary cognitive and perceptual skills to negotiate roads without adult supervision.

Most cycling injuries occur on public roads and don't involve another vehicle, but occur when children fall off their bikes.

For young cyclists, a footpath or shared path is the best place to ride, where available. It is legal for children under 12 to ride on the footpath, but it is important to be aware that driveways are dangerous. Children under the age of 10 should ride under the supervision of adults.

It is recommendable for everyone to wear approved cycling helmets that fit correctly at all times while riding. Head injuries are the main cause of death and disability for cyclists.

In Eastern province, particularly Chipata reports of accidents involving cyclists have continued to rise. Even though the wearing of helmets significantly decreases the chances of serious injury in the event of crashes, no cyclists in Chipata use helmets.

It is important that you ensure your children wear a helmet at all times whilst cycling, or skateboarding.

In Zambia there have been reports of children being run over by motor vehicles at their own home. This, in itself is an indicator of the dangers that faces these vulnerable road users even in their own homes.

Characteristically, these crashes occur in driveways where children aged around 2 – old enough to be mobile but not old enough to be easily visible from the driver's seat – move behind vehicles driven by their parents.

It is recommended that children are always supervised, and not left alone to play, especially when they are near parked or moving cars. Hold their hands or hold them close to keep them safe. Make access to the driveway from the house difficult for young children.

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