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World Health Day

Road accidents will be 3rd biggest killers in 2020

■ Health minister says Lahore ambulance service to start in May

By Waqar Gillani

LAHORE Road safety, this year's theme for World Health Day (today), is on course to become a major crisis by 2020, when traffic accidents will kill an estimated 60 percent more people than the 1.18 million killed in 2002.

World Health Day is held to mark the founding of the World Health Organisation (WHO) on April 7, 1946. The slogan for this year is 'Road safety is no accident', meaning safe traffic requires deliberate effort by governments and their partners.

A WHO report says that a strong political commitment is key to preventing road accidents, and governments have the most important part to play in creating enabling environments for road safety and to raise awareness about the health impact.

"Road traffic injuries can be prevented and their consequences can be alleviated. The knowledge currently exists to take action on a number of fronts to prevent road traffic injuries. The challenge is to adapt successful strategies, which have been used in high-income countries to low and middle-income countries, or else develop new strategies for these settings, particularly where road traffic

injuries are increasing at alarming rates," says the report.

According to the report, there is an average of one car for every two or three people in developed countries. In other countries, cars are growing in popularity while other types of motor vehicles such as motorcycles or already the primary mode of transport.

The report estimates that in 2002, road accidents and crashes killed 1.18 million people and injured about 20 to 50 million more. Around five million were disabled for life. If the current trend continues, by the year 2020 the annual number of deaths and disabilities from traffic injuries will have risen by more than 60 percent to number three on WHO's list of leading contributors to the global burden of disease and injury. They were at number nine on the list in 1990.

Speaking to Daily Times, Punjab Health Minister Dr Tahir Ali Javed said there was little awareness about road safety in Pakistan. He said deaths in road accidents were increasing day by day.

He said the Punjab government had celebrated World Health Day every year. "This year we have arranged a number of activities and a policy will be considered to raise awareness in the general public."

Mr Javed said the Punjab government had already approved an ambulance service in Lahore which is to finally start in May. "This service will be provided at five major points in the city," he said. "It was delayed because of difficulties in finding proper places."

The WHO says that the main risk factors for road traffic crashes and injuries include the level of economic development, demographic factors such as age, gender and place of residence, land-use planning practices, a mixture of vulnerable road users and high-speed motorised traffic, and lack of consideration for the ways in which roads will be used when determining speed limits, road design and layout.

Risk factors for crashes include inappropriate and excessive speed, presence of alcohol and other drugs, fatigue, being young and male, being a vulnerable road user in an urban and residential area, travelling in darkness, poor vehicle maintenance, road design, layout and maintenance defects, inadequate visibility due to weather conditions and poor eyesight.

Risk factors influencing the severity of a crash are individual characteristics such as age, which influence the ability of a person to tolerate a crash; inappropriate and excessive speed; no use of seat belts and

The first death by car

LAHORE The first person to be killed by a motor vehicle was a 44-year-old mother of two, Bridget Driscoll, in August 17, 1896. She and her teenage daughter were on their way to see a dance performance at Crystal Palace in London when she was struck by a car as they crossed the palace grounds. Witnesses said the car was going "at tremendous speed". The car, travelling at eight miles per hour, was breaking the four miles per hour speed limit. The young male driver was giving free rides to demonstrate the new invention and apparently trying to impress a young female passenger. At the inquest, the coroner said, "This must never happen again." **STAFF REPORT**

child restraints by vehicle users; unforgiving roadside objects such as concrete pillars; and insufficient vehicle crash protection such as airbags and vehicle soft fronts for pedestrians struck by vehicles.

Risk factors influencing the consequences of injuries sustained as result of a crash are delayed crash detection and transport to a health facility, rescue and evacuation, lack of appropriate care prior to arriving at a health facility, post-collision fire and leakage of hazardous material.

The WHO says road safety is a coordinated effort and many different groups should contribute, including federal ministries; local governments and their planning, engineering, health and police departments; national, state or provincial

and local associations representing road users, professional drivers and transportation organisations, and victims of road traffic injuries; vehicle manufacturers and vehicle insurers; universities and other research institutes; professional associates representing scientists, engineers, urban and regional planners, health professionals, police, lawyers and educators; and anyone else with particular concern about road safety such as school boards, parent-teacher associations and associations of older persons.

The report recommends that in addition to road safety agencies, a dedicated scientific institute and data-collecting centre be set up to undertake independent research and guide the road safety agency.