

Slovak Town Targets Traffic Injuries

For the 7,000 residents of Turcanske Teplice, Slovakia, health promotion begins in the most public of places: the streets. As more cars have crowded the town's roads in recent years, traffic accidents have emerged as a public health threat--last year, 47 traffic accidents in the town's vicinity resulted in 21 injuries and one death. In response, town officials and the schools have joined with the medical, law enforcement, and transportation communities to launch an innovative program designed to reduce such accidents, limit accident-related injuries and mortality, and reduce health care costs arising from accidents.

The three-year effort, sponsored in part by the Turcanske Teplice-Cleveland healthy communities partnership, focuses on educating children and adults in first aid and traffic safety, improving the conditions of local roads, and establishing better emergency care for traffic-related injuries (the town recently purchased its first ambulance). With the nearest hospital 50 kilometers away, administering adequate treatment at the site of an accident is a critical traffic safety skill, noted town mayor Alena Chlapniková, MD: "Frequently, the reason for a high mortality rate for traffic accidents and injuries is the absence of first aid or its inappropriate use--especially with cases of bleeding, or paralysis due to wrong positioning or suffocation."

One of the project's offshoots involves testing drivers on first aid skills, and spot-checking cars for the presence of first aid kits, which are required by Ministry of Health regulations. Another of the project's goals is increasing the local blood supply; the Slovak Red Cross and the Faculty Hospital of Martin (the nearest hospital to Turcanske Teplice) successfully recruited 186 donors in 1996 as part of two mass blood drives.