

Countries graded on the level of safety provided to children and adolescents

On November 20, 2007 results rating performance on child and adolescent safety for 18 countries in Europe were released by the European Child Safety Alliance, EuroSafe.

The 18 Child Safety Report Cards along with complimentary Child Safety Profiles and an 18 country summary report card are part of an EU-funded project led by the Alliance. The Report Card results show how well governments are doing on addressing accidental injury in children and adolescents. The grades are based on the extent to which countries had implemented and enforced evidenced based national policies that have been shown to prevent and reduce injuries to July 2006.

The Report Cards show Sweden, Netherlands and Northern Ireland occupying the three top places in the performance grades while at the bottom are Portugal, Greece and Spain.

The countries were scored on the basis of dozens of proven policies divided into different themes, such as road accidents, drowning, falls, poisoning, burns and choking. Effective measures include well-known measures, such as child seats in cars, bicycle helmets and smoke detectors as well as more recent recommendations, such as fencing for private swimming pools and support for vehicle design to reduce risk of pedestrian injury.

Some interventions are educational, such as home visiting programs that include education of parents on child safety topics, while others involve changes in engineering design, for example child resistant packaging of medicines and household cleaning products or establishment and enforcement of legal requirements, such as requiring children to use personal floatation devices (life jackets) while on the water.

The Report Cards also graded countries on their leadership for child and adolescent safety and whether the necessary infrastructure and capacity resources have been committed. For example has a national government department been given a clear mandate and responsibility for the coordination of child and adolescent safety activities across sectors; one of the key measures to supporting effective efforts to reduce child and adolescent injury.

It has been estimated by researchers that if strategies currently known to be effective were uniformly implemented that 90% of injuries could be prevented. In 2001 alone, there would have been over 6700 fewer deaths to children and adolescents in the EU25 if the rates in all countries had matched Sweden's injury rate, the country with the lowest child injury rates in Europe in that year. Given that there are still gains to be made in Sweden, this number represents a conservative estimate of potential life savings across Europe.

The countries participating in the Report Card assessments received middle grades (scores ranged from 20 to 40 points out of a maximum 60) indicating room for improvement in all countries. Generally speaking child safety grades based on adoption, implementation and enforcement of evidenced good practice policy, correspond to the overall rate of injury deaths by country.

Many countries scored best on road traffic safety, the biggest cause of accidental death in childhood and probably the area in which intervention measures are best known and most investment has been made over a longer period of time. Whereas the injury areas related to home safety (falls, burns and scalds and choking/strangulation) and water safety in general did not receive as high scores and need increased attention.

All countries could increase the level of safety provided to children and adolescents by adopting, implementing and enforcing what has been proven to work and this should be encouraged and supported by the European Commission and international organisations such as WHO and UNICEF. Countries with lower grades can also look to the experiences and successes of countries with stronger grades to assist in making their countries safer for children and adolescents.

The Report Cards are the assessment phase of a wider project aimed at establishing national Child Safety Action Plans which is a large-scale initiative whose purpose is to use standardised tools and processes to facilitate development of national action plans to enhance child and adolescent safety in Europe.

The initiative is led by the European Child Safety Alliance of EuroSafe, with co-funding and partnership from the European Commission, the Health and Environment Alliance (HEAL), the UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre, the Universities of Keele and the West of England, WHO-Europe and partners in 18 countries.

Complete results for Country Report Cards, Profiles and the 18 Country Report Card and the Summary Report for the Child Safety Action Plan initiative can be accessed at www.childsafetyeurope.org