

Hi, I'm Deboki Chakravarti, I'm a science educator, and today we're going to talk about everyday injuries.

If you're clumsy like me, it might be easy to dismiss injuries because minor ones happen all the time. But when you add up all the injuries across an entire population, they're actually a major public health problem.

Now, in public health, "injuries" are defined as harm caused by an external force strong enough to exceed what our bodies can handle.

Sometimes injuries are intentionally inflicted, like through assault or gun violence. But since at least the 1980s, unintentional injuries like drownings and car crashes have claimed more lives than intentional ones. In fact, unintentional injuries are actually the leading cause of death for people under 44.

But just because some injuries happen by accident doesn't mean we can't do anything to prevent them.

The first step is finding out who's at risk for what injuries. And when we look at the U.S. as a whole, risk is largely dependent on age.

For infants, the biggest risk of unintentional injury is an unsafe sleeping situation. When babies roll over onto soft pillows or get tangled up in loose blankets, they can end up suffocating. So after identifying the risks, public health professionals have to figure out how to tackle them. And when trying to help infants, their first strategy is educating caretakers.

The American Academy of Pediatrics says that caretakers can reduce the risk of injury to infants by putting them on their backs in a crib with a firm bed. And instead of piling on blankets, they can dress the baby in some cozy layers.

But once babies grow into kids, the threat isn't pillows anymore -- it's pools. Drowning is one of the leading causes of death for kids under fifteen.

Plus, statistics show that some populations in the U.S. are more affected than others. Black children under 15 are much more likely to drown than white children of the same age. And while we don't know for sure, this difference is likely rooted in inequality -- Black communities usually have fewer swimming pools than white communities.

Research suggests that teaching people how to swim can reduce drowning deaths, but that doesn't mean that swimming lessons will get rid of the racial gap. So, public health experts are trying to fix the problem while attempting to understand it better.

For instance, several counties in Florida with large Black populations have offered free swimming lessons to try and reduce the number of drowning deaths.

And over time, they observed that the difference in drowning rates between Black and white people in Florida dropped dramatically, giving other states a possible action plan for protecting their kids, too.

Now, once kids grow into teens, public health shifts its focus off drowning and onto driving. In 2019, almost 2400 teens were killed in car crashes -- and that's in the U.S. alone.

Some states have addressed this by implementing graduated driver's license programs, which break the process of getting a license into smaller steps. Before getting a real license, teens might start with a learner's permit and then get an intermediate license with restrictions. Some of these restricted licenses don't allow teens to drive at night, when they're more likely to get into car crashes.

Over the years, safety programs like these have reduced the number of 16-year-olds lost to car crashes in the U.S. by about 20%.

But once we get older and spend more of our time at work, our jobs become the biggest source of unintended injuries. We're talking everything from farm workers getting heat exhaustion to office workers slipping on wet floors.

In the U.S., there's an entire federal agency dedicated to keeping the workplace safer. The Occupational Safety and Health Administration, or OSHA, uses a combination of training, education and safety regulations to prevent work-related deaths and promote the well-being of all workers.

We can thank OSHA for things like 15-minute breaks during a long shift, or shade requirements for people who work outside.

Before OSHA became a thing in 1970, the U.S. lost about 38 lives a day to workplace injuries. As of 2019 it's down to about 15 a day . . . which is still high! To bring that number down further, OSHA regularly inspects workplaces and issues fines to employers who put their staff at risk.

Whether it's drowning among kids or car crashes among teens, injuries may seem like tragic, one-off events. But public health professionals see the patterns between these everyday injuries and look for ways to address those patterns -- making our lives a little safer.

Thanks for watching! This video is part of a series created by Complexly and the American Public Health Association to shed a little light on the important work that public health does. To learn more, visit apha.org.

Sources:

