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Prevent Winter Slips and Falls

TWIN FALLS-With winter here, Idaho public health officials are urging seniors to understand and follow safety tips to help prevent outdoor falls caused by icy conditions. Falls are the leading cause of accidental injury deaths among Idahoans 65 and older, with Idaho EMS responding to more than 5,500 fall-related calls for that age group in 2010.

“Winter can be an especially dangerous time of year for falls when sidewalks, parking lots, and steps become covered in ice,” says Elvia Caldera from South Central Public Health District. “Those who are at risk for falls should be especially cautious and aware of outdoor conditions. Fit and Fall Proof™ classes offered locally can help seniors gain the strength to improve their safety during winter months.”

Participants from the local Fit and Fall Proof™ classes have expressed that even though falls are unavoidable, having stronger legs, ankles, and arms help them to get up quicker and may even keep them from going to a doctor or hospital.

Seniors should also consider taking the following precautions to make outdoor outings safer in the winter:

- Wear shoes that have traction. Carry dress shoes with you and change at your destination.
- Carry a cell phone when you are outside.
- Keep an eye out for wet floors or stairs that may be slippery due to melting snow.
- Go slowly to keep your balance. Plan for extra time.
- Strengthen your legs. If you slip, strong muscles can help catch you. If you do fall, they can help you get up easier.

One way to strengthen leg muscles and improve balance is to take part in the free local Fit and Fall Proof™ classes. These classes offer low to moderate intensity exercises designed to

reduce the risk of falls and improve mobility, balance and strength. The classes also offer seniors an opportunity to expand their social network.

Another step to preventing outdoor falls is to check the areas around seniors' homes. Make sure railings on steps are secure and there is salt and a shovel handy inside the house. Keep an eye out for falling snow and ice from roof or gutters. Ice and snow should be removed as soon as possible.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, an older adult is treated in a hospital emergency room for a fall every 18 seconds, and every 35 minutes an older adult dies as a result of a fall-related injury. In Idaho, there is an average of 113 fall-related deaths among seniors each year. Taking precautions to prevent winter falls can help reduce this number and improve the quality of life for many seniors.

For a complete list of Fit and Fall Proof™ classes and more tips on preventing falls, visit www.phd5.idaho.gov or call South Central Public Health District at 737-5988.

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