



Hyde County, North Carolina

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N.C. Public Health Urges Seniors to Prevent Falls By Staying Strong

Contact: Julie Henry, 919-707-5053

RALEIGH - Each day, more than 110 senior citizens end up in emergency departments across North Carolina because of injuries from falls. Recognizing that falls are a major health problem for older adults, Gov. Bev Perdue has declared the first week of fall, Sept. 19-24, as Falls Prevention Awareness Week.

"Many falls among people over 65 can be prevented simply through regular exercise," State Health Director Jeff Engel said. "Older people can make tremendous improvements in their balance and strength by getting fit and staying active. Small changes can make a big difference and go a long way to preventing falls."

Over the course of a year, more than 40,000 emergency room visits across the state are the result of fall injuries suffered by seniors, according to the N.C. Division of Public Health's Injury and Violence Prevention Branch. And tragically, more than 600 North Carolina seniors die each year due to falls. Fall injuries also are very expensive. In 2007, hospital charges alone added up to more than \$425 million statewide.

Studies show that a combination of interventions can significantly reduce falls in the older adult population. Experts recommend a physical activity regimen with balance, strength training, and flexibility components; consulting with a health professional about getting a fall risk assessment; having medications reviewed periodically, getting eyes checked annually; and making sure the home environment is safe and supportive.

At senior centers across North Carolina, programs like A Matter of Balance and tai chi classes help older adults gain the strength, improved balance, and confidence to help them live healthier lives and preserve their independence.

"A good first step for seniors is to ask their doctors if they are at risk for a fall," Sharon Rhyne, programs manager at the N.C. Division of Public Health and member of the North Carolina Falls Prevention Coalition said. "Doctors can talk with patients about strength or balance exercises that are a good fit for their lifestyles."

North Carolina is part of the Falls Free© Initiative, which includes 43 states and 70 national organizations, professional associations, and federal agencies across the country dedicated to reducing fall-related injury and death among older adults.

Events for Falls Prevention Awareness Week are happening in many communities across the state. Contact your local senior center or Area Agency on Aging for more information.

Hyde Health Director Wesley Smith has passed along a few tips for Hyde residents to design their own fall prevention program.

1) Answer a few quick questions to see if you are at risk for a fall:

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| • Do you sometimes feel dizzy for a few seconds after you stand up? | Yes | Yes |
| | No | No |
| • Has it been more than a year since you got your eyes checked? | Yes | Yes |
| | No | No |
| • Do you walk to the bathroom at night without any light? | Yes | Yes |
| | No | No |
| • Do you take four or more medications? | Yes | Yes |
| | No | No |
| • Do you worry about falling? | Yes | Yes |
| | No | No |

If you answered yes to two or more of the questions, make a note to talk to your doctor about falls.

2) Take all of your medications out and look to see if they are expired. Get rid of any medicine that is out of date.

- Don't flush medicine down the toilet!
- Put all your old medicines (including liquids) in something you can throw out, like a margarine tub or plastic bag with a zipper top that will stay closed.
- Mix the old medicine up with used kitty litter or coffee grounds-the idea is to use something nobody wants to get into.
- Seal the container and throw it in the trash.

3) Get a little exercise! Balance on one leg while doing everyday tasks, such as brushing your teeth, watching TV, or standing in line. Caution! If you aren't so steady on your feet, hold on to a table, chair, or counter for extra support.

4) An easy step you can take is to clean your glasses. Look how easy preventing falls can be!

5) Focus on home safety. Look around your home and see if there are things that could trip you up. Remove any small rugs that could cause a fall.

Fall prevention programs will take place in Hyde County this week, as well as throughout the state. For more information, contact Hyde County Health Department at 926-4200.

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Mazie Smith, Manager
Hyde County, North Carolina
(252) 926-4400

Megan S. Shaw
Hyde County Public Information Officer
(252) 926-4373