



# Public Health

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### Press Release

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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**HEADLINE: Prevent Winter Slips and Falls**

LEWISTON, IDAHO - 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 Deb Merica, RN, BSN, Fit and Fall Proof™ Coordinator for Public Health. “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 and confidence they need to improve their safety during winter months.”

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 or low cost local Fit and Fall Proof™ classes. These classes offer low 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 the roof or gutters. Ice and snow should be removed as soon as possible.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), 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 further information about the Fit and Fall Proof™ activities in your area, please visit [www.idahopublichealth.com](http://www.idahopublichealth.com) or call Public Health – Idaho North Central District at (208) 799-3100.