

Alaska Commission on Aging

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Press release

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Governor Parnell Sets “Senior Fall Prevention Week”

Falls are top cause of injury for seniors; advocates launch prevention campaign

Accidental – and usually preventable – falls are the number one cause of injury to Alaskans age 65 and older, often causing serious injury such as brain trauma or hip fracture.

To highlight fall hazards and the easy steps Alaskans can take to reduce them, Alaska Governor Sean Parnell has proclaimed the first week of fall, Sept. 21st through 27th, “Senior Fall Prevention Week.”

The week kicks off a fall-prevention campaign by the Alaska Commission on Aging and the Alaska Senior Fall Prevention Coalition. All Alaska senior centers will receive a fall-prevention tool kit from the Coalition, including a poster, slideshow, checklists, and more. A new set of educational materials will be sent out monthly by the Coalition. For the tool kit and other resources, visit www.alaskaaging.org/falls.

“Most falls are preventable,” said Denise Daniello, executive director of the Alaska Commission on Aging. “We encourage families, service providers, volunteers and neighbors to learn more about common tripping hazards, and take action to reduce them, at home and in our communities.”

Approximately one-third of older Alaskans will fall each year, and an average of 579 seniors will be hospitalized as a result. Even minor fractures can increase a senior’s risk of dying within the next five to ten years, according to recent research. Falling and the fear of falling can lead to depression, loss of mobility, and reduced independence in seniors.

Fifty percent of fall hospitalizations among seniors are attributable to a “slip, trip, or stumble” incident, according to the Alaska Trauma Registry. Another common scenario involves falling on steps or stairs. Ten percent of senior falls in Alaska are alcohol-related. Drugs (including prescription drugs) are a factor in fourteen percent of older Alaskans’ falls.

Seniors are urged to discuss their medications (including over-the-counter drugs) and alcohol use with their physician, to have their sight and hearing checked, to begin a program of regular exercise, and to review their homes for hazards such as loose rugs, clutter on the floor, puddles of liquid, steps in ill repair, dark hallways or stairwells, and loose electrical cords.

The Coalition encourages communities to commit to reducing risks for seniors by keeping sidewalks and parking lots free of snow, ice, gravel, and uneven pavement, and by offering education, home modification programs, and exercise classes designed to improve seniors’ strength and balance.

