



For Immediate Release:
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News Release

Program Can Reduce Older Adult Falls by 31%

(Salt Lake City, UT) – Every day, an average of eight Utahns age 65 and older are hospitalized for injuries due to a fall. In 2010, there were 3,129 fall-related hospitalizations among older Utahns, costing more than \$85 million in treatment charges. Falls were the leading cause of injury-related death among older adults in Utah. The Utah Department of Health (UDOH) wants to remind everyone that injuries from falls are largely preventable.

“Falls are not a normal part of aging,” said Trisha Keller, Program Manager for the UDOH Violence and Injury Prevention Program. “Most falls are preventable if we can teach older adults what hazards to remove in their homes and help them increase their strength and balance.”

Stepping On is a 7-week program now being implemented by local health departments across the state. The program focuses on empowering older adults to engage in health behaviors that reduce the risk of falling, such as removing tripping hazards in their homes and doing simple exercises to build strength and improve balance. And national research shows the program works: falls among study participants were reduced by 31 percent.

Seventy-five-year-old John “Charley” Jones joined a *Stepping On* class last year after noticing his balance wasn’t as good as it had been. “I tended to shuffle when I walked and thought I better try to preserve or improve on what I have so it didn’t get worse,” Jones said. “I would encourage others to take the class. The instructors made everyone feel comfortable and I never felt like an old, decrepit person there. The classes were not only informative and helpful, they were fun, too,” he added.

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“Our goal is to help our citizens remain independent and healthy,” said Karen Jensen, a *Stepping On* instructor at the Utah County Health Department. “Even minor falls can have a dramatic impact on a person’s well-being and sense of safety.”

Several new *Stepping On* classes will begin in September and October. The classes are free and will be held at:

- **Orem Friendship Center** (93 North 400 East, Orem) every Friday beginning September 23, 2011 until November 4, 2011 from 9:30 a.m. to 11:30 a.m. To register for the class, participants must be a member of the center. Call 801-229-7111.
- **Springville Senior Center** (65 East 200 South, Springville) every Friday beginning September 23, 2011 until November 4, 2011 from 1:00 p.m. to 3:00 p.m. To register for the class, call 801-851-7095.
- **North Davis Senior Activity Center** (42 South State Street, Clearfield) every Thursday beginning October 13, 2011 until December 1, 2011 (except on Thanksgiving Day) from 9:00 a.m. to 11:00 a.m. To register for the class, call 801-525-5076.
- **Wasatch County Senior Citizens Building** (465 East 1200 South, Heber City) every Tuesday beginning October 11, 2011 until November 22, 2011, 9:30 a.m. to 11:30 a.m. To register for the class, call 435-657-3312.

The UDOH recommends four basic steps to reduce the risk of falls:

- **Begin a regular exercise program.** Exercise improves strength and balance, as well as coordination.
- **Have your health care provider review your medicines.** Some medicines or combinations of medicines can make you sleepy or dizzy and cause you to fall.
- **Have your vision checked.** Have your eyes checked by an eye doctor at least once a year. Poor vision can increase your chances of falling.
- **Make your home safer.** Remove tripping hazards like throw rugs and clutter in walkways as well as books and papers from stairs. Install grab bars next to your toilet and shower.

Utah joins 43 other states in recognizing September 23, 2011 as Falls Prevention Awareness Day. For more information about falls or the *Stepping On* program, visit <http://health.utah.gov/vipp/olderAdults/overview.html>.

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The mission of the Utah Department of Health is to protect the public's health through preventing avoidable illness, injury, disability and premature death, assuring access to affordable, quality health care, and promoting healthy lifestyles.