



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

GOVERNOR DECLARES FALLS PREVENTION AWARENESS WEEK:
SEPT. 20-26

What do Hillary Clinton, Margaret Thatcher, the Pope, Sonia Sotomayor and Steven Tyler of Aerosmith have in common? They have all sustained broken bones or other injuries from a fall this summer. And they are not alone. In North Carolina, falls are the leading cause of fatal injuries and the second- leading cause of nonfatal injuries for people 65 and older. That's why Gov. Beverly Perdue has declared the first week of fall, Sept. 20-26, to be Falls Prevention Awareness Week.

Health, community and senior service organizations across the state will observe Falls Prevention Awareness Week by holding presentations, classes, health fairs and exercise demonstrations to raise awareness among older persons and their families about the seriousness of falls and ways to reduce fall risks to stay active and independent.

"Adults age 65 and older have a 30-50 percent chance of falling, and that risk increases as people age. Since older adults are the fastest growing population in North Carolina, we want to make sure they are aware of ways to reduce their chances of having a life-altering fall," said Dr. Jeffrey Engel, State Health Director.

"Approximately 20-30 percent of older adult falls result in moderate to severe injuries, such as broken bones, hip fractures or head traumas. And as people age, their risk of falling increases significantly, threatening their independence and quality of life. We want to educate seniors about what they can do to stay independent, healthy and on their feet," said Dr. Jan Busby-Whitehead, Professor and Chief, Division of Geriatric Medicine and Director of the UNC Center for Aging and Health.

To help prevent a fall, consider taking the following steps:

- Exercise regularly. Research shows that strengthening your legs, improving your balance and increasing your overall mobility are the most effective actions you can take to prevent falls.

- Ask your doctor or pharmacist to review your medicines. Make sure to have prescriptions and any over-the-counter medications reviewed to reduce side effects and interactions.
- Have your eyes checked by an eye doctor at least once a year.
- Install grab bars near the toilet and around the shower or bath stall, and put handrails in stairwells or other risk areas.
- Make sure your home is well-lit. As people get older, they need brighter lights to see well.
- Use a walking aid if it will help your mobility. But if you do use a walking aid (such as a cane or walker), work with a physical therapist or other health care provider to learn how to use it safely.

Organizations interested in observing Falls Prevention Awareness Week can find resources and activity ideas at <http://www.healthyagingprograms.org/content.asp?sectionid=149>.

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The North Carolina Falls Prevention Coalition brings together public health officials, researchers, planners, health care providers, housing specialists, aging services providers, and many others to work together to reduce the number of falls and fall-related injuries for North Carolinians.

For additional information about the North Carolina Falls Prevention Coalition or Falls Prevention Awareness Week, please contact Sharon Rhyne, NC Division of Public Health, at 919-707-5205 or Ellen Schneider, UNC Institute on Aging, at 919-843-8528.