



NEWS RELEASE

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Leading Health Problem for Seniors Highlighted by Fall Prevention Week

Falls are a Leading Cause of Injury and Death yet Easily Prevented

San Mateo, Calif. – A simple fall can be a nuisance to many of us, yet to a senior it can be a matter of life or death. Fall Prevention Week, September 21 to September 28, will focus on efforts to help seniors learn how to reduce their risk of falling. The San Mateo County Fall Prevention Task Force has a number of activities planned to raise awareness of the serious risk that falls pose to seniors' health, and to provide seniors with help to reduce that risk.

The Task Force recently completed a study among seniors, physicians and senior-care providers living in San Mateo County and found that while most of them believe that falls are a serious health problem, few believe they are personally at risk. Yet, falls are the # 1 reason for injury-related hospitalizations for San Mateo County residents ages 55 years and older, and the leading cause of death for residents over the age of 75.

“Every 18 seconds, an older adult is treated in an emergency department in San Mateo County for a fall. Falls don't have to be an inevitable part of aging--there are proven strategies that can reduce the risk of falling such as exercising 30 minutes a day, or removing throw rugs from the home,” said Patrice Christensen, Co-Chair of the San Mateo County Fall Prevention Task Force and Injury Prevention Program Coordinator for the San Mateo County Health Department.

The Task Force has planned a number of activities this week to highlight this health issue and offer solutions to seniors to help them reduce their risk of falls:

- Table tents with fall prevention tips are being sent to approximately 40 senior centers and senior residences in the County.
- Fall prevention tip flyers are being delivered to approximately 450 homebound seniors through the Meals on Wheels program.
- Fall Prevention Day at Hillsdale Shopping Center (September 23, 10 a.m. - 3 p.m.): local pharmacists will be volunteering their time to talk individually with members of

the public and review their medications. In addition, healthcare professionals will be available to discuss how to prevent falls.

- Fall prevention reception at Little House Senior Center, Menlo Park (September 25, 1 p.m.): results of community survey will be shared with seniors who participated in the study.
- San Mateo Senior Center's Health and Wellness Fair, San Mateo (September 27, 10 a.m. – 2 p.m.): Fall Prevention tip sheets will be available as well as healthcare professionals to answer questions regarding fall prevention.

In addition, members of the Fall Prevention Task Force offer on-going programs to help seniors reduce their risk of falling. Sequoia Hospital has a six week program that goes over the major risk factors for falls, including medication management, strength and balance and exercise, home safety and other factors contributing to falls. Mills-Peninsula Hospital has a balance and fall prevention exercise class called “Fallproof.” Stanford University Medical Center offers a free home-based program called “Farewell to Falls.” An Occupational Therapist comes to the home for two home visits and looks at various risk factors for falls. Seton Medical Center’s Balance and Mobility Center offers diagnosis and treatment for dizziness and balance problems.

“Our goal is to make sure every senior—and everyone caring for a senior—in San Mateo County knows that a fall can seriously injure an older adult,” said Ellen Corman, Co-Chair, San Mateo County Fall Prevention Task Force and Injury Prevention Coordinator at Stanford University Medical Center Trauma Service. “And our goal is also to make sure that these seniors and caregivers know that there are things they can do to help prevent those falls, and resources in the community that can help them.”

About the San Mateo County Fall Prevention Task Force

The Task Force is a coalition of 30 agencies throughout San Mateo County and beyond dedicated to reducing falls among the older adult members of our community. For more information go to www.smcfallprevention.org.

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FALL PREVENTION TIPS

Medical experts recommend these four fall prevention tips:

- **Stay active – exercise for 30 minutes a day.** Exercises that improve endurance, strength, balance, flexibility and mobility can help reduce your risk of falling. Talk to your doctor before beginning any exercise program.
- **Check your vision.** Vision helps prevent falls by allowing you to see hazards and adjust your balance. As you age, your vision changes—you need more light and more contrast to see things. Eye diseases can also reduce your ability to see clearly. Have your vision checked every year!
- **Review your medications.** Taking four or more prescription medications puts you at higher risk for falling. Certain medications or interactions between medications can increase your risk for falls. Ask your doctor to review all your medications—prescription, over-the-counter, vitamins and herbal supplements.
- **Make your home safe.** Your home can be made safer by installing grab bars, adding a stair rail, increasing lighting, picking up clutter and removing throw rugs. You can also be safer in your home by not hurrying, moving commonly used items so that they are within easy reach and avoiding risky behaviors such as using step stools and climbing ladders.