

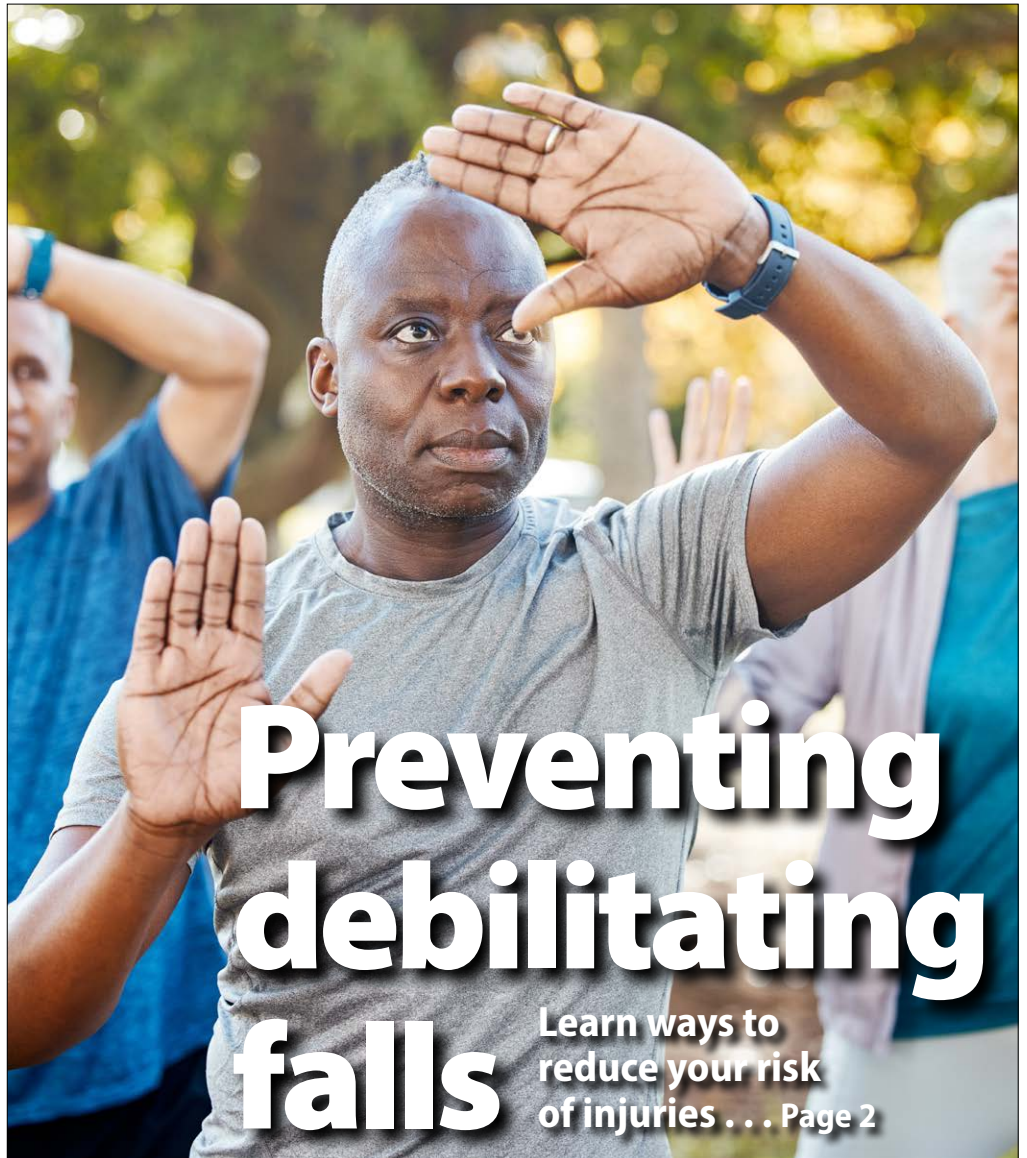


HEALTH MATTERS

ISSUE 35 | ISLAND COUNTY PUBLIC HEALTH | NOVEMBER 2023

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Preventing debilitating falls

Learn ways to reduce your risk of injuries . . . Page 2

FALL RESPIRATORY VIRUS GUIDANCE

With students back in school, and as we prepare for cooler temperatures, here are some prevention steps for a healthy fall season.

Locally, Island County is seeing an uptick in COVID-19 infections, which aligns with a national COVID-19 wave. The most recent data, including hospital admissions, test positivity, and wastewater levels,

shows moderate COVID-19 activity. We also expect cases of Respiratory Syncytial Virus, or RSV, to rise as we head into fall.

RSV is a common virus that usually causes mild cold-like illness but can be dangerous for young

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FALLING NOT A NORMAL PART OF AGING

LEARN HOW TO REDUCE YOUR RISKS

Falls are common and costly, especially among people age 65 and older. They are, however, preventable and do not have to be an inevitable part of aging.

Every second of every day, someone age 65 or older suffers a fall in the U.S. That makes falls the leading cause of injury and injury death in this age group. One out of four older adults will fall each year in the United States, making falls a public health concern, particularly among the aging population, according to the Centers for Disease Control & Prevention.

Falls are not a normal part of aging. You can keep on your feet and avoid the risk of a fall. The CDC says people

at risk of falls can take steps to stay safe and independent longer.

Learn what you can do to reduce your chances of falling. A great first step is reading CDC's [Stay Independent brochure](#). Complete the questionnaire; if you score four or more points, you may be at higher risk for falling.

Speak Up

Talk openly with your doctor about fall risks and prevention.

Tell your doctor right away if you have fallen, if you're afraid you might fall, or if you feel unsteady.

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Determine Your Risk of Falling

Circle "Yes" or "No" for each statement below			Why it matters
Yes (2)	No (0)	I have fallen in the past year.	People who have fallen once are likely to fall again.
Yes (2)	No (0)	I use or have been advised to use a cane or walker to get around safely.	People who have been advised to use a cane or walker may already be more likely to fall.
Yes (1)	No (0)	Sometimes I feel unsteady when I am walking.	Unsteadiness or needing support while walking are signs of poor balance.
Yes (1)	No (0)	I steady myself by holding onto furniture when walking at home.	This is also a sign of poor balance.
Yes (1)	No (0)	I am worried about falling.	People who are worried about falling are more likely to fall.
Yes (1)	No (0)	I need to push with my hands to stand up from a chair.	This is a sign of weak leg muscles, a major reason for falling.
Yes (1)	No (0)	I have some trouble stepping up onto a curb.	This is also a sign of weak leg muscles.
Yes (1)	No (0)	I often have to rush to the toilet.	Rushing to the bathroom, especially at night, increases your chance of falling.
Yes (1)	No (0)	I have lost some feeling in my feet.	Numbness in your feet can cause stumbles and lead to falls.
Yes (1)	No (0)	I take medicine that sometimes makes me feel light-headed or more tired than usual.	Side effects from medicines can sometimes increase your chance of falling.
Yes (1)	No (0)	I take medicine to help me sleep or improve my mood.	These medicines can sometimes increase your chance of falling.
Yes (1)	No (0)	I often feel sad or depressed.	Symptoms of depression, such as not feeling well or feeling slowed down, are linked to falls.
Total _____			Add up the number of points for each "yes" answer. If you scored 4 points or more, you may be at risk for falling. Discuss this brochure with your doctor.

This checklist was developed by the Greater Los Angeles VA Geriatric Research Education Clinical Center and affiliates and is a validated fall risk self-assessment tool (Rubenstein et al. J Safety Res; 2011: 42(6)493-499). Adapted with permission of the authors.

Reduce your risk of injuries suffered from falls

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Review all of your medicines with your doctor or pharmacist and discuss any side effects like feeling dizzy or sleepy. Some medicines, even over-the-counter medicines and herbal supplements, can increase your fall risk.

Do you get dizzy or lightheaded when you go from sitting to standing? CDC's [Postural Hypotension](#) brochure has information on how to manage these symptoms.

Have your eyes checked annually and update your glasses, as needed. Conditions like cataracts and glaucoma limit your vision.

Have your feet checked. Discuss proper footwear with your doctor and ask whether seeing a foot specialist (podiatrist) is advised.

The following are some simple measures that you can do to keep yourself from falling.

TALK TO YOUR DOCTOR

Ask your doctor or healthcare provider to evaluate your risk of falling and talk with them about specific things you can do.

Ask your doctor or pharmacist to review your medicines to see if any might make you dizzy or sleepy. This should include prescription medicines and over-the-counter medicines.

Ask your doctor or healthcare provider about taking vitamin D supplements.

DO STRENGTH & BALANCE EXERCISES

Do exercises that make your legs stronger and improve your balance. Tai Chi is a good example of this kind of exercise.



Facts About Falls

Data from the Harborview Injury Prevention Research Institute (HIPRC) reveals the following:

- Falls are the leading cause of fatal and nonfatal injuries among older adults.
- More than one in four adults ages 65 and older fall each year.
- Older Adult Falls: A Pressing Issue in Island County
- Island County's median age is about 17% higher than the U.S. and Washington state median age.
- Throughout 2021 and 2022, falls

were the leading cause of emergency department visits at WhidbeyHealth.

- From May 2021 to May 2022, there were 868 visits by Island County residents to the emergency department at WhidbeyHealth, coded as "Falls 65+".

- From May 2021 to May 2022, there were 739 visits by Island County residents to all other emergency departments across WA, coded as "Falls 65+".

- Rates of 65+ falls are higher for Camano Island residents than Whidbey Island residents.

HAVE YOUR EYES CHECKED

Have your eyes checked by an eye doctor at least once a year, and be sure to update your eyeglasses if needed.

If you have bifocal or progressive lenses, you may want to get a pair of glasses with only your distance prescription for outdoor activities, such as walking. Sometimes these types of lenses can make things seem closer or

farther away than they really are.

MAKE YOUR HOME SAFER

Get rid of things you could trip over.

Add grab bars inside and outside your tub or shower and next to the toilet.

Put railings on both sides of stairs. Make sure your home has lots of

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County, WhidbeyHealth working together to help prevent falls

Twenty percent of all 911 requests for EMS services by Whidbey residents involved ground-level falls involving people 65 and older, according to Robert May, lead/chief paramedic and community outreach coordinator for WhidbeyHealth Emergency Medical Services.

And Island County Public Health recognized through its Community Health Needs Assessment that senior falls are a barrier to community wellness and the ability of seniors to age in place and maintain independence, May said.

Data shows that a person's home is the most dangerous place they will occupy. Nearly 85 percent of all falls occur within or directly outside a person's own home, May said. Exercise has been proven to significantly decrease or prevent such falls.

Because of Public Health's research, and information gathered from other public safety agencies, senior falls prevention was added to the county's Community Health Improvement Plan, or CHIP.

Washington State Department of Health's Injury Prevention Division created a senior falls prevention exercise program, Staying Active and Independent for Life, or SAIL.

SAIL is a free one-hour daily program that focuses on warm up, aerobics, strength, balance, falls prevention education, and cool down. It was found that participating in a senior falls prevention exercise program is best to prevent falls by those 65+.

Through payroll deduction by EMS employees, and grants to the WhidbeyHealth Foundation by local citizens, Whidbey EMS began providing in-person weekly

SAIL classes.

WhidbeyHealth EMS' Zoom SAIL program was found to not just be statistically beneficial for people 65 and older, but has also provided greater hope and less fear among program participants.

SAIL helps participants to understand common causes of falls within and around the home and to create strategies to either lessen or completely stop falls. Not using throw rugs, safe use of extension cords, sitting up at the edge of bed prior to walking to the restroom, and installing grab bars in the bathroom and shower are examples of helpful strategies.

WhidbeyHealth EMS partnered with the WhidbeyHealth Foundation, Island County Public Health, and volunteer organizations such as Hearts and Hammers to acquire grab bars and install them for free in Whidbey Island residents' homes, according to May.

WhidbeyHealth EMS also partnered with Island County Public Health and WhidbeyHealth Medical Center to provide in-person Tai Ji Quan classes in the Rob and June Sebo Health Education Center, May said. *(See more information about the classes on page 12).*

Whether the classes are in person or virtually, program participants report that they enjoy the community they have through SAIL and Tai Chi, both of which prevent isolation, depression, and fear of falling, May said.

- To learn more about WhidbeyHealth EMS' injury prevention programs, email to Rob May at mayrob@whidbeyhealth.org or call the EMS Administrative phone number of 360-914-3193.

PREPARING FOR SEASONAL STORMS

Living on an island, be prepared to lose communication, utilities

Island County's Department of Emergency Management offers a wealth of information about how to best prepare for disasters.

As winter rolls our direction, being ready for potential storms is important, especially living on an island that could be left without water, power or other vital services for days.

Winter storms can disrupt utility services, close local businesses and negatively impact road conditions, according to county DEM officials.

Cold and below-freezing temperatures can occur without snowfall and can cause serious or even life-threatening health problems if an individual is ex-

Sign up for [Island County emergency alerts](#) and follow the Island County Department of Emergency Management's [Facebook page](#).

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Island County Public Works Emergency Response

County road crews respond to emergencies such as sanding icy roads, snow plowing, downed tree removal, storm clean up, flooding, and traffic accidents.

[Report a problem or request a service](#) to Island County Public Works.

1. Priority snow removal routes for the [Oak Harbor Road District](#).
2. Priority snow removal routes for the [Coupeville Road District](#).
3. Priority snow removal routes for the [Bayview Road District](#).
4. Priority snow removal routes for the [Camano Island Road District](#).



Emergency Supply Kit

 non-perishable food & can opener	 bottled water	 first aid kit	 prescription medication	 hygiene items
 battery-operated radio	 spare batteries	 flashlights	 extra clothing	 extra cash

For a complete list of items and additional information:
www.ready.gov/kit

How you can prepare for winter storms

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posed to the elements without proper clothing or shelter.

The following are ways you can prepare for inclement weather or a major winter storm.

- Listen to your radio or television for winter storm forecasts and other information.
- Prepare your home for cold weather. Install storm windows. Insulate outside walls, attics and crawl spaces. Wrap pipes, especially those near cold outer walls or in attics or crawl spaces. Repair leaks in the roof, around the doors and in the windows.
- Have appropriate cold weather clothing available.
- If you have a kerosene heater, refuel your heater outside and remember to keep it at least three feet from flammable objects.
- Make sure your fireplace functions properly.
- Have rock salt and sand on hand for traction on ice.
- Fill your gas tank before the snow starts falling.

During a winter storm, follow these tips:

- Wear several layers of loose-fitting, lightweight, warm clothing rather than one layer of heavy clothing. Wear mittens rather than gloves. Wear a warm, woolen cap.
- Do not drive unnecessarily.
- Reduce the temperature in your home to conserve fuel.
- Heat only the areas of your home you are using. Close doors and curtains or cover windows and doors with blankets.
- Use alternative heat methods safely. Never use a gas or charcoal grill, hibachi or portable propane heater to cook indoors or heat your home.

Keep Safe on the Road

Protect yourself and your passengers. Allow extra time to reach your destination during inclement weather. It takes only one unprepared or careless driver to slow or stop traffic.

- Check statewide pass conditions online before heading out or planning trips.
- Drive for conditions: slower speeds, slower acceleration, leave extra space between vehicles, give yourself more time and space to stop.
- Check to see if you have traction tires & chains.
- Know what the traction & chain requirements mean.
- Watch a video to learn how to install tire chains.
- Do not use cruise control.
- Four-wheel and all-wheel vehicles do not stop or steer better on ice.
- Leave extra room between your vehicle and the vehicle in front of you. And remember, the larger the vehicle, the longer the stopping distance.
- Slow down when approaching intersections, off-ramps, bridges, or shady spots.
- If you find yourself behind a snowplow, slow down and give the plow a little extra room.
- Slow down and be extra cautious near the chain-up and removal areas. There are often people out of their vehicles.

- Never use a generator indoors or in a garage or carport.
- Be careful when shoveling snow. Do not overexert yourself.
- Be sure to eat regularly. Food provides calories that maintain body heat.
- Watch for signs of frostbite and hypothermia — slurred speech, disorientation, uncontrollable shivering, stumbling, drowsiness and body temperature of 95 degrees Fahrenheit or less.
- If you become trapped outside, get out of the wind and stay dry. Build a lean-to or snow cave if nothing else is available. Do not eat snow; it will make you too cold.
- Bring dogs and cats inside during cold weather.

If you find yourself driving or stuck in your vehicle during a winter storm, here are some safety tips:

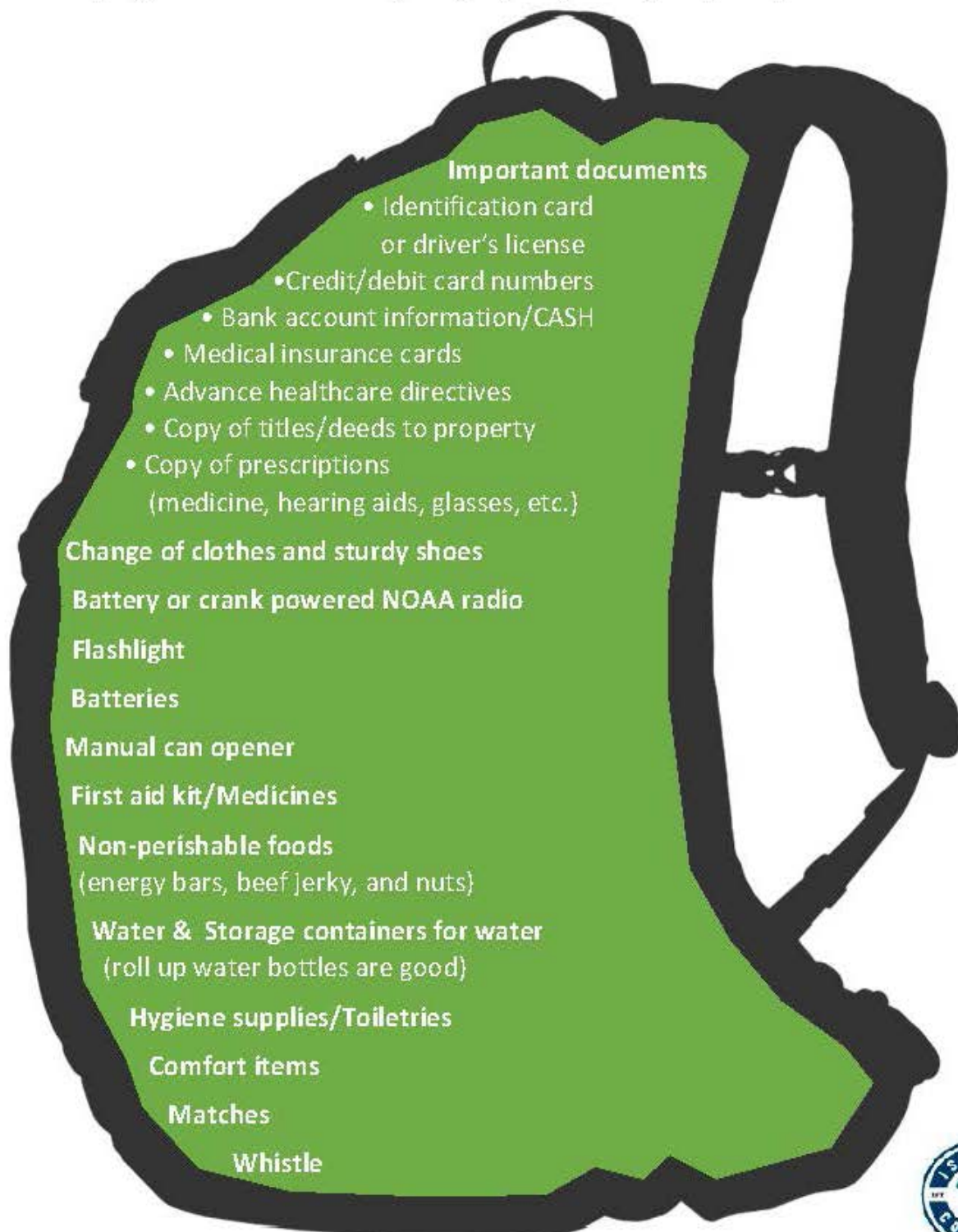
- Make sure someone knows where you are going. Stay on the main roads.
- If you must stop, remain inside the vehicle. Use a bright distress flag or your hazard lights to draw attention to your vehicle.
- If trapped in a blizzard, clear your tail pipe and run your engine and heater for 10 minutes every hour. Open your window slightly.
- During night hours, keep the dome light on in the car so rescue crews can see your vehicle.
- Keep an emergency kit in your vehicle. Include a three-day supply of water and non-perishable food that can be eaten without being cooked. Include a blanket or sleeping bag for each passenger, a flashlight, cell phone, shovel, sack of sand or kitty litter, booster cables, flare, coffee can with lid, and toilet paper.

Items to Include an Emergency Supply Bag

Go-Bag Checklist

For more information go to:

<https://www.islandcountywa.gov/477/Emergency-Preparedness>



The Community Health Assessment

Building a road to better community health

The Island County Community Health Assessment (CHA) is community-driven information gathering process that informs the community about the Community Health Improvement Plan (CHIP).

CHIP requires partnerships throughout the Island County community to prioritize objectives and goals that are achievable and measurable.

“As the assessment supervisor, I am facilitating the process, which includes working with the Assessment Team to develop and administer data collection tools, analysis and distribution of CHA findings,” said Island County Public Health employee Taylor Lawson.

“The next step is the Community Health Improvement Plan (CHIP) which is informed by the outcomes of the CHA,” she said.

ABOUT THE COMMUNITY HEALTH ASSESSMENT

- Multi-sector collaborations that support shared ownership of all phases of community health improvement, including assessment, planning, investment, implementation, and evaluation
- Proactive, broad, and diverse community engagement to improve results

- A definition of community that encompasses both a significant enough area to allow for population-wide interventions and measurable results, and includes a targeted focus to address disparities among subpopulations

- Maximum transparency to improve community engagement and accountability

- Use of evidence-based interventions and encouragement of innovative practices with thorough evaluation

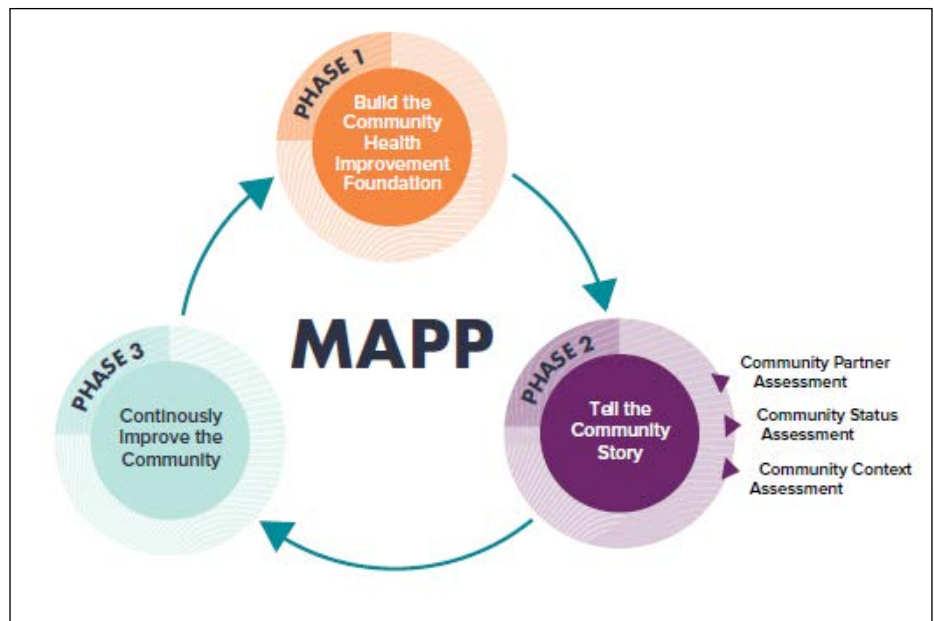
- Evaluation to inform a continuous improvement process

- Use of the highest quality data pooled from, and shared among, diverse public and private sources

The ultimate goal of a community health assessment is to develop strategies to address the community's health needs and identified issues. Island County Public Health and Human Services also emphasizes the importance of celebrating the strengths and assets of our community.

Broad Steps of the CHA, CHIP

1. Organize and plan;



2. Engage the community.

3. Develop a goal or vision.

4. Conduct community health assessment(s).

5. Prioritize health issues.

6. Develop community health improvement plan.

7. Implement and monitor community health improvement plan, and.

8. Evaluate process and outcomes.

Foundational Principles

Principles for Mobilizing for Action Through Planning & Partnerships (MAPP) are:

- **Equity** - Encourages shared exploration of the social injustices including structural racism, class oppression, and gender oppression, that create and perpetuate inequities. Mobilizes community action to address these injustices through transformative change to the structures and systems that perpetuate inequities and creates the opportunity for all to achieve optimal health.

- **Community Power** - Actively builds community power to ensure those most impacted by the inequities and actions are those that guide the process, make key decisions, and help drive action.

- **Inclusion** - Fosters belonging and prevents “othering” by identifying and eliminating barriers to community participation and ensuring all stakeholders and community members, regardless of background or experience, can contribute to the MAPP process.

- **Trusted Relationships** - Builds connection and trust by honoring the knowledge, expertise, and voice of community members and stakeholders.

- **Strategic Collaboration and Alignment** - Creates a community-wide strategy that appropriately aligns the missions, goals, resources, and reach of cross-sectoral partners to improve community health and address inequities.

- **Data and Community Informed Action** - Identifies priorities, strategies, and action plans that are driven by the community's voice and grounded in community need as identified through timely qualitative and quantitative data.

- **Full Spectrum Actions** - Encourages community improvement through approaches ranging from provision of direct services to Puget Sound Energy and community power building for supportive communities that enable health and well-being for all.

- **Flexible** - Meets the real-time, evolving, and unique needs of diverse communities, organizations, and sectors through an adaptable framework.

- **Continuous** - Maintains continuous learning and improvement through iterative community assessment, planning, action, and evaluation cycles.

Learn more about CHA on the [Island County website](#), or from the [Centers for Disease Control and Assessment website](#).



Getting regular medical exams key to preventing serious illnesses

Getting regular health exams can help find medical problems early when your chances for successful treatment are greater. The exams and screenings a person should have depends on their age, lifestyle, health and family history.

Regular checkups are separate from any other doctor's visit for sickness or injury.

In addition to physical exams, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention say that these visits can focus on preventive care, such as:

- Screening tests, which are medical tests to check for diseases early, when they may be easier to treat.
- Services, for example, vaccines (shots), that improve your health by preventing diseases and other health problems.
- Education and counseling to help you make informed health decisions.

Know Your Family Health History

[Family health history](#) is a record of the diseases and health conditions in your family. You and your family

members share genes. You may also have behaviors in common. You may live in the same area and come into contact with similar harmful things in the environment.

Most people have a family health history of at least one [chronic disease](#), such as cancer, heart disease, and diabetes, according to the CDC. If you have a close family member with a chronic disease, you may be more likely to develop that disease yourself, especially if more than one close relative has (or had) the disease or a family member got the disease at a younger age than usual.

How often should adults get a checkup?

Recommendations regarding the frequency of routine checkups are based on a person's age, risk factors, and current health status.

Routine checkups with your doctor are generally recommended as follows:

- Every 2-3 years before age 40, every other year 40-50, and annually after age 50 for people who are in good health. Also, regular dental

cleanings are a part of maintaining good health.

- Those with a chronic disease such as diabetes or chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, regardless of age, should see a doctor more frequently.

Stay Up to Date on Cancer Screenings

Cancer screening means checking your body for cancer before you have symptoms. Getting screening tests regularly may detect breast, cervical, and colon cancers early, when treatment is likely to work best. Lung cancer screening is recommended for some people who are at high risk. [Learn about CDC-recommended screening tests.](#)

Get Vaccinated

[Vaccination](#) is one of the safest and most convenient ways to protect your health. Vaccines offer protection in different ways, but they all help your body remember how to fight a specific infection in the future. It typically takes a few weeks after vaccina-

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tion for the body to build up that protection.

What happens during a checkup?

During your annual checkup, your doctor may review your past health history, evaluate your current health, and schedule appropriate screening tests.

An adult annual checkup may include a review of the following:

- Medical history.
- Family history.
- Review of current medications and allergies.
- Vaccination and screening test history.

For women, testing may also include:

- Mammogram between the ages of 50-74.
- Pap smear to screen for cervical cancer screening, between ages 21-65
- Cholesterol screening, starting at age 45
- Osteoporosis screening starting at age 65

For men, testing may also include:

- Screening for abdominal aortic aneurysm, from ages 65-75 if there is a history of smoking.
- A prostate exam. Discuss with your provider whether it's a good idea starting at age 50.
- High cholesterol screening, starting at age 35.

Preparing for a checkup

If you're seeing a new doctor, have in hand your medical information, including your insurance card, old records, and vaccination history. Take these with you.

If you don't have your vaccination history, your doctor can order blood work to test for antibodies in your blood.

If you've seen the doctor before, make a list of what's changed in your medical and surgical histories since your last visit.

Ensure your medication list is current, including any vitamins, supplements, over-the-counter medications, and herbal remedies you are taking.

Make a list of any new symptoms, allergies, or reactions to medications.

Let your doctor's office know if you have any special needs, such as an interpreter or a wheelchair, so these services are available when you arrive.

Talking to your doctor

Open and honest communication between you and your doctor is important when it comes to your health. It allows you to play an active part in your healthcare and helps your doctor provide the best care possible.

The following are tips on how to communicate with your doctor:

- Make a list of your questions and any topics you want to discuss with your doctor. Prioritize your questions with the most important ones first.
- If you don't understand something that your doctor tells you, let them know and ask them to use simple terms.
- If your doctor doesn't answer your question completely, ask for more information.
- Keep in mind that your doctor can't share your information without your permission, making it easier to talk about uncomfortable or embarrassing topics.

Having accurate and complete information is the only way your doctor can determine the most appropriate treatment plan and help you to the best of their ability.

Well-child checkups keep children healthier

To ensure better health outcomes, children should have regular wellness visits and health screenings, according to the Washington State Healthcare Authority.

Well-care visits are routine examinations that provide the best opportunity for a healthcare practitioner to observe the progress of your child's physical and mental development. They also offer a chance to detect problems through screening tests; provide any necessary immunizations; allow you and your child to ask any healthcare questions you might have; and to get to know one another.

There is evidence that regular well-care visits can help children be ready for and do better in school, according to the state Department of Health.

Insured children, adolescents, and young adults ages 0 through 20 in Washington state, may get a free health checkup every year. If you need help finding a clinic near you or have trouble scheduling a visit, call your insurance company.

If you need help finding coverage, go to wahealthplanfinder.org or call 1-855-923-4633. Well-child checkups are a part of Early Periodic Screening, Diagnosis, and Treatment, a comprehensive and preventive health care benefit for Apple Health clients under the age of 21.

Why get a well-child checkup?

Taking your child or teen to their regular checkups is an important part of making sure they remain healthy and on track to meeting their wellness goals, according to the state Healthcare Authority.

Well-child visits are about more than just your child's physical health. These checkups are also a chance to discuss developmental and behavioral health concerns, get support for your child's well-being, and ask any questions. Sharing concerns with your child's provider can help find and treat problems early.

Some things you may talk about at the visit may include your:

- Child's growth and development.
- Family's health.
- Everyday life and challenges.
- Successes and milestones.

What happens during a well-child checkup?

During a well-child checkup your child or teen will have a complete physical exam as well as time to discuss and address topics not included during sick child visits, these topics include:

- Blood lead screening.
- Developmental and behavioral health screening.
- Eating or sleeping problems.
- Family health history.
- General health and well-being.
- Hearing or vision screening.
- How your child is growing.
- Oral health.
- Parent/caregiver concerns.
- Immunizations/vaccines and tests needed.

Your child's health care provider may refer you and your child for additional assessments or recommend services with other specialty providers to address concerns identified during the well-child checkup.

When to schedule an appointment

Contact your health care provider to find a schedule that works best for your family. At a minimum, your child should get a check-up at the following ages:

Before age 1: at 1 week, 1 month, 2 months, 4 months, 6 months, and 9 months;

Ages 1 - 4 years: 12 months, 15 months, 18 months, 24 months, 30 months, 3 years, and 4 years, and;

Ages 5 - 20: Once a year

Apple Health covers nonemergency medical transportation for eligible clients to and from covered services, including well-child checkups, through contracted brokers when eligibility requirements are met.

• For more information, see Healthcare Authority's [transportation services \(nonemergency\) web page](#).

Learn strategies to help decrease the spread of respiratory illnesses

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children and older adults. Flu season activity varies each year but usually peaks between December and February.

There are simple and effective strategies we can take to help decrease the spread of respiratory illness.

1. Staying home when sick prevents spread and decreases risk for vulnerable groups.

2. Washing hands with soap and water for 20 seconds is an effective way to prevent spread.

3. Taking other simple steps, like covering coughs and sneezes, avoiding sharing food and drinks, and wearing a well-fitting mask in crowded indoor environments can help.

4. Start with healthy lifestyle choices, such as limiting refined sugars, eating plenty of fruits and vegetables, managing stress, staying hydrated, and getting quality sleep, help keep our immune systems strong.

5. Staying up to date on immunizations helps prevent severe disease, and vaccination is especially important for vulnerable people, like the elderly and the immunocompromised.

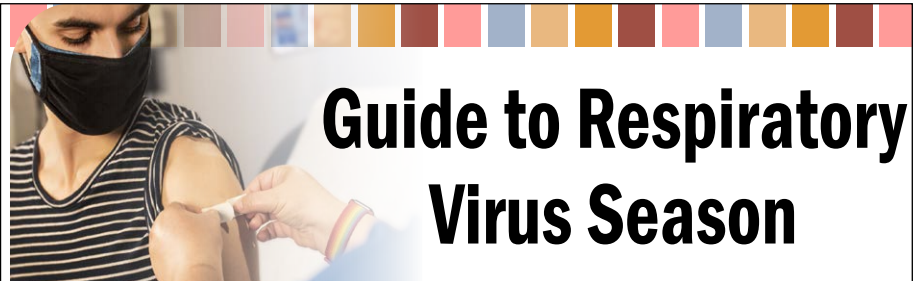
The CDC recommends that everyone ages 5 and older receive an updated COVID-19 vaccine as soon as possible to protect against serious illness this season.

Children ages 6 months to 4 years old may need one or more doses of the updated vaccine depending on whether they've received COVID-19 shots previously.

People who are moderately or severely immunocompromised may get additional doses of the updated vaccine.

If you're older and you get COVID-19, talk to a doctor about taking Paxlovid or a different treatment. It can make a big difference.

The federal government approved the first RSV vaccines, for people aged 60 and older. If you qualify, talk with your provider about getting your RSV vaccine.



Guide to Respiratory Virus Season

Respiratory illnesses like Influenza virus (flu), COVID-19, and Respiratory Syncytial Virus (RSV) spread easily in fall and winter, when people spend more time together indoors. These illnesses affect your respiratory system and therefore your breathing. When multiple viruses are spreading, it can strain the healthcare system and make it harder to access care for other issues, as well.

Who is at risk? Most people recover from respiratory illnesses with rest at home, but even common illnesses can turn serious. Infants and young children, older adults, and people with underlying health complications are at higher risk for severe illness.

Why vaccinate? Immunizations can mean the difference between recovering at home and ending up in the emergency department. They are one of the most powerful prevention tools we have. Along with steps like washing hands and staying home if you are sick, it is important to stay up to date on all recommended vaccines for your age and health status. Vaccines are a safe and effective way to protect against hospitalization, long-term complications, or death from these diseases.

Symptoms and care:

Symptoms vary. The most common include runny nose, coughing, sneezing, tiredness, fever, and sore throat.

- If you have mild symptoms and are not high-risk: Stay home and away from others, take over-the-counter medications to ease symptoms, rest, and drink plenty of fluids.
- If you have more intense, persistent symptoms or are part of a high-risk group: Call your healthcare provider or local clinic.
- If you have extreme symptoms such as trouble breathing: Seek immediate medical attention.

[Click here for Island County Public Health information](#)



Vaccinate

Your best defense against respiratory illnesses



Wash hands

Frequently wash your hands with soap and water



Isolate if sick

Monitor symptoms and prepare to isolate from others if sick



Consider wearing a mask

in indoor crowded spaces



Although there is no RSV vaccine currently available for infants, children under 8 months can receive treatment to prevent severe illness.

Parents may want to discuss this treatment with their pediatrician.

This year's flu vaccine shots are now available and it's best to get your family immunized as soon as

possible.

Keep an eye on community levels of respiratory viruses, as well as guidance from public health on steps to stay safe and healthy.

Visit the [Island County Public Health Seasonal Respiratory Illness web page](#) for more information.

Identify, correct the conditions that are likely to cause falls

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light by adding more or brighter light bulbs.

Stay Active

- Do exercises, Tai Chi for example, that make your legs stronger and improve you balance.
- Make Your Home Safe
- Get rid of trip hazards. Keep floors clutter free.
- Add grab bars in the bathroom.
- Have handrails and lights installed on all staircases.
- Use the [Check for Safety brochure](#) to help identify and eliminate additional fall hazards in your home.

What Can Happen After a Fall?

Many falls do not cause injuries. But one out of five falls does cause a serious injury such as a broken bone or a head injury.

These types of injuries can make it hard for a person to get around, do everyday activities, or live on their own.

Falls can cause broken bones, like wrist, arm, ankle, and hip fractures.

Falls can cause head injuries. These can be very serious, especially if the person is taking certain medicines (like blood thinners).

An older person who falls and hits their head should see their doctor right away to make sure they don't have a brain injury.

Many people who fall, even if they're not injured, become afraid of falling. This fear may cause a person to cut down on their everyday activities.

When a person is less active, they become weaker and this increases their chances of falling.

What Conditions Make You More Likely to Fall?

Research has identified many conditions that contribute to falling. These are called risk factors.

Many risk factors can be changed or modified to help prevent falls. They

include:

- Lower body weakness.
- Vitamin D deficiency (that is, not enough vitamin D in your system).
- Difficulties with walking and balance.
- Use of medicines, such as tranquilizers, sedatives, or antidepressants. Even some over-the-counter medicines can affect balance and how steady you are on your feet.
- Vision problems.
- Foot pain or poor footwear.
- Home hazards or dangers such as broken or uneven steps, and throw rugs or clutter that can be tripped over.

Most falls are caused by a combination of risk factors. The more risk factors a person has, the greater their chances of falling.

Healthcare providers can help cut down a person's risk by reducing the fall risk factors listed above.

STEADI Initiative

CDC's Injury Center created the Stopping Elderly Accidents, Deaths & Injuries (STEADI) initiative for healthcare providers who treat older adults who are at risk of falling, or who may have fallen in the past.

On the [STEADI page of its website](#), the CDC provides links to materials for health care providers to draw upon when screening and assessing patients with high fall risks and intervening in the treatment of these individuals.

STEADI tool kit resources are designed to help health care providers incorporate fall risk assessment, treatment, and referral into clinical practice, and to facilitate patient referrals to community-based fall prevention programs.

Those resources were designed for clinicians in primary care settings, including physicians, physician assistants, nurses, and nurse practitioners.

Specific items also can be used by pharmacists, physical therapists, and occupational therapists.

Classes can help reduce chances of falling

- **Free Tai Ji Quan: Moving for Better Balance** classes are 10-11 a.m. Mondays at the Coupeville Rec Hall. (These classes were held in HEC room C at WhidbeyHealth, but the last class at that location is 10 a.m. Tuesday, Nov 7.) Email to Liz at l.dickman@islandcountywa.gov for more information.
- **Free Zoom SAIL online class** from noon to 1 p.m. and 1:15-2:15 p.m. on Tuesdays and Thursdays. Email to mayrob@whidbeyhealth.org or call 360-720-1860 for information.
- **Soundview Center SAIL class** 11 a.m. to noon Mondays and Wednesdays and Fridays at 432 3rd St., Langley. Cost is \$5 per session or \$40 per month. Email to llpt@lonelakept.com or call 360-321-4434 for information.
- **Camano Center SAIL Class** held multiple times Monday through Friday at 606 Arrowhead Road, Camano Island. Cost is \$2 for center members, \$5 for nonmembers. Cost is \$2 for center members, \$5 for non-members. For more information, or to learn availability of classes, go to www.camanocenter.org or call 360-387-0222. *
- **The Center Enhance Fitness Class** 8:45-9:45 a.m. and 10-11 a.m. Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays at 51 SE Jerome St., Oak Harbor. Cost of the class is \$7 drop-in fee or \$35 per month (Center membership discount available.) For information, go to www.oakharbor.org/sr-svcs or 360-279-4580. *

* Ask about additional classes available at these locations.

Four things YOU can do to prevent falls:

① Talk openly with your healthcare provider about fall risks & prevention.

Tell a provider right away if you fall, worry about falling, or feel unsteady. Have your doctor or pharmacist review all the medicines you take, even over-the-counter medicines. As you get older, the way medicines work in your body can change. Some medicines, or combinations of medicines, can make you sleepy or dizzy and can cause you to fall. Ask your provider about taking vitamin D supplements to improve bone, muscle, and nerve health.

② Exercise to improve your balance and strength.

Exercises that improve balance and make your legs stronger, lower your chances of falling. It also helps you feel better and more confident. An example of this kind of exercise is Tai Chi.

Lack of exercise leads to weakness and increases your chances of falling.

Ask your doctor or healthcare provider about the best type of exercise program for you.

③ Have your eyes and feet checked.

Once a year, check with your eye doctor, and update your eyeglasses, if needed. You may have a condition like glaucoma or cataracts that limits your vision. Poor vision can increase your chances of falling. Also, have your healthcare provider check your feet once a year. Discuss proper footwear, and ask whether seeing a foot specialist is advised.

④ Make your home safer.

- Remove things you can trip over (like papers, books, clothes, and shoes) from stairs and places where you walk.
- Remove small throw rugs or use double-sided tape to keep the rugs from slipping.
- Keep items you use often in cabinets you can reach easily without using a step stool.
- Have grab bars put in next to and inside the tub, and next to the toilet.
- Use non-slip mats in the bathtub and on shower floors.
- Improve the lighting in your home. As you get older, you need brighter lights to see well. Hang light-weight curtains or shades to reduce glare.
- Have handrails and lights installed on all staircases.
- Wear well-fitting shoes with good support inside and outside the house.



Talk to your doctor about fall prevention.



Island County would like to acknowledge the 69 Local Businesses That Employ Our Neighbors Who Experience Developmental Disabilities! October is Disability Employment Awareness Month

3 E's Doing the 3 P's
Orlando's Southern BBQ
Ace Hardware - Freeland
All Hearts Agency LLC
Applebee's
Best Western
Camano Lutheran Preschool
Candlewood Suites
Cascade Connections - Barkley Co.
Dairy Queen
Dana MacInnis - John L Scott
Donna's Dahlias
Eastside Mattress
Elks Lodge #2362 Oak Harbor
Family Bible Church
Freeland Cafe
Frontline Cleaners
Grace By the Sea

Grocery Outlet - Oak Harbor
Grocery Outlet - Stanwood
Haggen
Hand in Hand Early Learning Ctr.
Home Depot - Oak Harbor
Home Place Memory Care
Island County
Island Drug - Oak Harbor
Island Oil
Island Senior Resources
Island Transit
Lotus Tea Bar
Main Market
Maple Leaf Cemetery
Maple Ridge
McDonald's - Oak Harbor
MOD Pizza—Stanwood
Napa - Freeland

Navy Exchange
New Leaf
N. Whidbey Parks & Rec. Dept.
Oak Harbor Cinemas
Oak Harbor School District
Orlando's Southern BBQ
Pacific Rim Institute
Papa John's
PNW Vibes
Rite Aid - Freeland
Safeway - Arlington
Safeway - Oak Harbor
SAS Retail Services
Safe Harbor Agency
Skookum
Smart Office NW - Freeland
Sno-Isle Libraries
Summer Hill Assisted Living

Summit Assistance Dogs
S. Whidbey Assembly of God
The Machine Shop
The Whidbey Montessori
Thrive Community Fitness
Useless Bay Animal Clinic
Useless Bay Golf & Country Club
VFW - Oak Harbor
Walgreens
Wallin-Stucky Funeral Home & Cremation
Welcome Home
Whidbey Golf Club
Whidbey Pies
Whidbey Presbyterian
Whidbey SeaTac Shuttle & Charter

These businesses are the heart of our continuing rebound, highlighted by the 79% employment rate in August 2023 for folks with developmental disabilities on Camano and Whidbey Islands! Our employers, communities, and families are stronger with your patronage.

employ multiple people who experience developmental disabilities

For more information contact Mike Etzell, Island County Developmental Disabilities Coordinator at 360-499-5401.

For Healthcare Providers

RESOURCE

Algorithm

for Fall Risk Screening, Assessment, and Intervention

As a healthcare provider, you are already aware that falls are a serious threat to the health and well-being of your older patients.

More than one out of four people 65 and older fall each year, and over 3 million are treated in emergency departments annually for fall injuries.

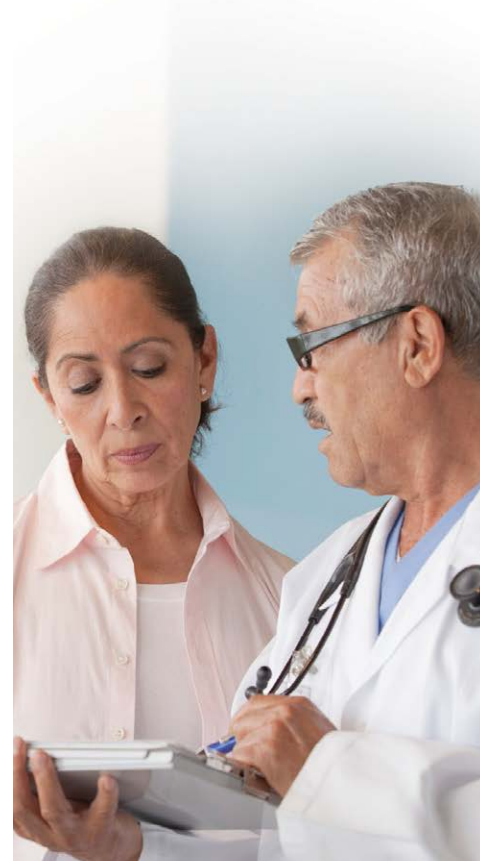
The CDC's STEADI initiative offers a coordinated approach to implementing the American and British Geriatrics Societies' clinical practice guideline for fall prevention. STEADI consists of three core elements: **Screen**, **Assess**, and **Intervene** to reduce fall risk.

The **STEADI Algorithm for Fall Risk Screening, Assessment, and Intervention** outlines how to implement these three elements.

Additional tools and resources include:

- ▶ Information about falls
- ▶ Case studies
- ▶ Conversation starters
- ▶ Screening tools
- ▶ Standardized gait and balance assessment tests (with instructional videos)
- ▶ Educational materials for providers, patients, and caregivers
- ▶ Online continuing education
- ▶ Information on medications linked to falls
- ▶ Clinical decision support for electronic health record systems

CDC's STEADI tools and resources can help you screen, assess, and intervene to reduce your patient's fall risk. For more information, visit www.cdc.gov/steadi.



You play an important role in caring for older adults, and you can help reduce these devastating injuries.



**Centers for Disease
Control and Prevention**
National Center for Injury
Prevention and Control

2019

STEADI Stopping Elderly Accidents,
Deaths & Injuries