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DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES SUPPORTS DIVISION

# HEALTH ALERT

## FALL PREVENTION ALERT!

Watch for signs that a person may have had an unwitnessed fall:

- Redness (hip, leg, arm, shoulder)
- Bruises or swelling
- Unexplained cuts or bleeding
- Expression or complaint of pain
- Change in behavior such as not using or favoring a body part

Call the Doctor if:

- There are more falls than usual
- Balance problems are present
- Falling occurs after starting a new medication or there has been a change in the dose
- There is pain, swelling or bruising
- The individual feels weak and tired.
- A brace or walking aid needs to be adjusted

Learn more at:

<http://www.mayoclinic.org/>

<http://www.webmd.com/>

<http://www.ddssafety.net/>

<http://www.dhss.delaware.gov/dph/ems/ipfall.html>

<https://www.ahrq.gov/professionals/systems/long-term-care/resources/injuries/fallspix/fallspixrisk.html>

**What is a fall?**

A fall is "an unexpected event in which the participant comes to rest on the ground, floor, or lower level." (Lamb et al., 2005)

**What is a frequent faller?**

Frequent fallers or repeat fallers are persons who have 2 or more falls in a 12-month period. The occurrence of falls increases with age.

**What is an injurious fall?**

A fall that requires medical attention is called an injurious fall. Five (5) to 22% of falls are injurious.

**Are falls a problem for individuals with intellectual disabilities?**

Yes. Fifty (50%) to 60% of injuries in people with ID are due to falls. Most injury related visits to the ER and admission to the hospital are due to falls. Falls are also the most common cause of fractures. The rate of fractures is 3.3 times higher for persons with ID compared to the general population.

**What causes a fall?**

Falls can be due to internal or external causes:

- Internal-physiological changes or conditions; medication side effects, abnormal gait/balance, poor vision, incontinence, pain/discomfort, age, impulsiveness, decreased sensation
- External-environmental hazards; weather, bad lighting, uneven surfaces, unsafe footwear, slippery floors, furniture or clutter in walkways, rushing

**How can falls be prevented?**

Measures can be taken to decrease the likelihood of falling.

**Conduct Assessments:**

- Evaluate the environment for hazards. Reduce and/or eliminate risk issues
- Identify risks that may cause an individual to be at risk for falling, such as changes in balance, walking or discomfort
- Collaborate with the team of professionals — PT, OT, BSCs to develop a fall prevention plan. Contact the PCP as necessary

**Plan:**

- Implement a plan to reduce the risk, such as a toileting schedule or placing items within reach. Support continued exercise, such as walking tai chi or passive exercises for those who have limited mobility

**Monitor:**

- Changes in condition when a medication is changed or added

Follow up with more care as needed.

**REMEMBER...it is possible to decrease the likelihood of falling.**

- Report incidents as required, monitor incident reporting to identify trends or an individual who needs further assessment or planning.
- Closely monitor an individual who has fallen for pain, bleeding or changes in alertness or confusion, ability to move or perform as usual.
- Seek medical attention as necessary.