

# Public Health Notes

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*NH DHHS Mission Statement: To join communities and families in providing opportunities for citizens to achieve health and independence.*

## Falls and Older Adults

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) each year in the United States one in every three adults 65 years of age or older falls. Falls can cause injuries such as bruises, lacerations, hip fractures, and head trauma. They are the leading cause of injury-related death and the most common cause of nonfatal injuries and hospital admissions for trauma for those 65 or older.

The death rate for falls among older Americans has risen sharply over the past decade.

Falls have other impacts too besides injury. Direct medical costs from falls based on 2000 numbers would be \$28.2 billion for 2010. Most people who fall, even if they are not injured, develop a fear of fall-

ing. This may cause them to limit their activity, which can then lead to reduced mobility and loss of physical fitness, which can actually increase their risk of falling.

The chance of being injured in a fall, logically, increases with age. Over 90% of hip fractures are caused by falling. The rate of hip fracture in women is three times that in men, but men are more likely to die from a fall than women. In New Hampshire in 2007, over 7,500 residents 65 and over visited an emergency room



because of a fall.

Fortunately, there are many steps older Americans can take to help prevent falls:

**Exercise** - Lack of exercise can lead to weak legs, which increases the chance of falling. Exercise programs can increase strength and balance thus making falls less likely.

**Be mindful of medications** - Some medications or combinations of medications can cause side effects, such as dizziness or drowsiness. This can make falls more likely. Having a doctor or pharmacist review all your medications can help reduce the chance of risky side effects and drug interactions.

**Keep your vision sharp** - Poor vision can make it harder to get around safely. Have an eye exam every

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## Important Dates

March is National Colorectal Cancer Awareness Month

March is National Endometriosis Awareness Month

March is National Nutrition Month

March 5-11 is National Sleep Awareness Week

March 12-18 is Brain Awareness Week

March 18-24 is National Poison Prevention Week

March 8 is World Kidney Day

March 24 is World Tuberculosis Day

April is Alcohol Awareness Month

April is National Autism Awareness Month

April is National Distracted Driving Awareness Month

April is National Donate Life Month

April is National Minority Health Month

April is Sexually Transmitted Infections Awareness Month

April 2-8 is National Public Health Week

April 21-28 is National Infant Immunization Week

April 7 is World Health Day

April 24 is World Meningitis Day



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year and wear glasses or contact lenses with the proper prescription.

**Eliminate hazards at home** - About half of falls happen at home. A home safety check can help identify fall hazards, such as loose rugs, clutter, and poor lighting.

The Department of Health and Human Services, Division of Public Health Services, Injury Prevention Program facilitates the New Hampshire Falls Risk Reduction Task Force. With an electronic membership of over 400 professionals statewide, the Task Force is made up of a variety of disciplines, all working with older adults and all sharing a commitment to reducing the risk and numbers of falls among New Hampshire's older adult population.

The Task Force over the years has been involved with many projects, including, but not limited to, an annual professional conference, trainings on best practice for acute, long-term care, and community-based settings, an evidence-based team project, development of a curricula for older adults on falls risk reduction, and the health communication campaign "You CAN Reduce Your Risk of Falls." The Task Force is a member of the national Falls Free Coalition facilitated by the National Council on Aging and has presented on falls statewide, nationally, and internationally. The Task Force's objectives are to:

- Reduce the rate of death and disability in the elderly due to falls.
- Reduce the risk of falling in the elderly population.
- Educate and train professionals working with the elderly on falls.

The Task Force meets the first Tuesday of every month 9:00 am to 11:00 am at 29 Hazen Drive in Concord, NH. *All are welcome.* If you are interested in becoming a member of the Task Force or signing up to be on the electronic list serve, please contact Rhonda Siegel at [rsiegel@dhhs.state.nh.us](mailto:rsiegel@dhhs.state.nh.us). Members of the list serve receive the latest research literature, news of upcoming trainings, national falls risk reduction initiatives, and more.

For more information about fall prevention, visit the CDC website at [www.cdc.gov/features/fallrisks](http://www.cdc.gov/features/fallrisks).

## Kicking the Habit - National Kick Butts Day

If you are a smoker and have been looking for a good time to quit, how about National Kick Butts Day, March 21<sup>st</sup>? The goal of the event is to get people talking about this dangerous habit, but if you missed the Great American Smokeout in November, why not quit now? Cigarette smoking is the leading cause of preventable death in the United States, accounting for approximately 443,000 deaths, or 1 of every 5 deaths, in the United States each year. Don't become a statistic. Quit for yourself and the ones you love. To get help, call the New Hampshire Smokers' Helpline at 1-800-Try-to-Stop (1-800-879-8678).



## World TB Day - March 24, 2012

Each year around the world 9 million people become sick with TB and almost 2 million die from it. In the U.S. there were 11,182 cases reported in 2010, which is the lowest number of cases since reporting began in 1953. One third of the world's population is infected with the bacterium that causes TB.

World TB Day is March 24<sup>th</sup> annually and commemorates the date in 1882 when Dr. Robert Koch announced his discovery of *Mycobacterium tuberculosis*, the bacterium that causes TB.

Tuberculosis can attack any part of the body, not just the lungs. TB is most often spread when an infected person coughs and the bacteria become airborne. It is treatable, but some strains required different medications and there is concern that some strains may be becoming resistant to the antibiotics that treat TB.

To learn more about tuberculosis go to [www.cdc.gov/tb](http://www.cdc.gov/tb). To find out more about World TB Day, visit [www.stoptb.org](http://www.stoptb.org).

## Vaccines for Adults

The vaccine most adults are familiar with is the influenza vaccine, but there are many others. A recent study from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) in Atlanta showed that few American adults were up to date on their immunizations. The survey also showed that about half of those surveyed are not concerned about whether they or an adult family member might get a vaccine-preventable disease.



“Vaccines are not just for children,” said Dr. José Montero, Public Health Director at the New Hampshire

Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS), Division of Public Health Services, “and many of us do not know about the new recommendations for adult vaccines. These vaccines are reducing our risk of disease and improving the quality of our lives.”

Vaccine-preventable diseases cause significant illness and death; at least 50,000 U.S. adults die from these diseases annually. There are more than 1 million cases of shingles and over 10,000 cases of cervical cancer every year in the United States. Cases of whooping cough have also increased since the low point in 1976, and new recommendations call for adults to receive a booster vaccine.

Vaccines are recommended that protect adults from: chickenpox, shingles, diphtheria, hepatitis A, hepatitis B, human papillomavirus (which can cause cervical cancer), influenza, measles, meningitis, mumps, whooping cough, pneumonia, rubella, and tetanus.

If you are unsure of your vaccination status or if you are a candidate for some of the adult vaccines, speak with your healthcare provider.

For more information, visit the NH Immunization Program at [www.dhhs.nh.gov/dphs/immunization/index.htm](http://www.dhhs.nh.gov/dphs/immunization/index.htm), call the Immunization Program at 603-271-4482, or visit the CDC website at [www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov).

## March is National Nutrition Month: Get Your Plate in Shape

National Nutrition Month is an annual nutrition education and information campaign run in March by the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics, formerly the American Dietetic Association. This year, the campaign focuses attention on the importance of making informed food choices and developing sound eating and physical activity habits.

An easy and fun way to do this is to try out the new U.S. Department of Agriculture SuperTracker (<https://www.choosemyplate.gov/SuperTracker/default.aspx>).

The SuperTracker is a visually appealing, comprehensive, state-of-the-art resource. It is designed to assist individuals as they make changes in their life to reduce their risk of chronic disease and maintain a healthy weight. Consumers can access this free, on-line tool anytime and choose a variety of features to support nutrition and physical activity goals. SuperTracker offers you an opportunity to:

- **Personalize recommendations** for what and how much to eat and your amount of physical activity.
- **Track foods and physical activity** from a database of choices.
- **Customize features** such as goal setting, virtual coaching, weight tracking, and journaling.
- **Measure progress** with reports ranging from a meal summary to analysis of food groups and nutrient intake.
- **Learn** the 2008 Physical Activity Guidelines.

The SuperTracker complements First Lady Michelle Obama’s *Let’s Move!* ([www.letsmove.gov](http://www.letsmove.gov)) initiative and provides practical information to help everyone build a healthier diet.

