

INJURY UPDATE

*A Report to Oklahoma Injury Surveillance Participants**

June 30, 2011

Falls Among People 65 Years of Age and Older, Oklahoma, 2008-2009

Falls among the older population, both nationally and in Oklahoma, are a growing public health problem. It has been estimated that one-third of older adults fall each year. As an individual ages, the likelihood of experiencing a fall dramatically increases.

Nationally, falls are the leading cause of nonfatal injury in all age groups but 15-24 year olds. For persons aged 65 years and older, falls are also the leading cause of injury death.

According to Oklahoma's inpatient hospital discharge database, in 2008 and 2009, there were 14,059 fall-related discharges among Oklahomans age 65 and older. These data

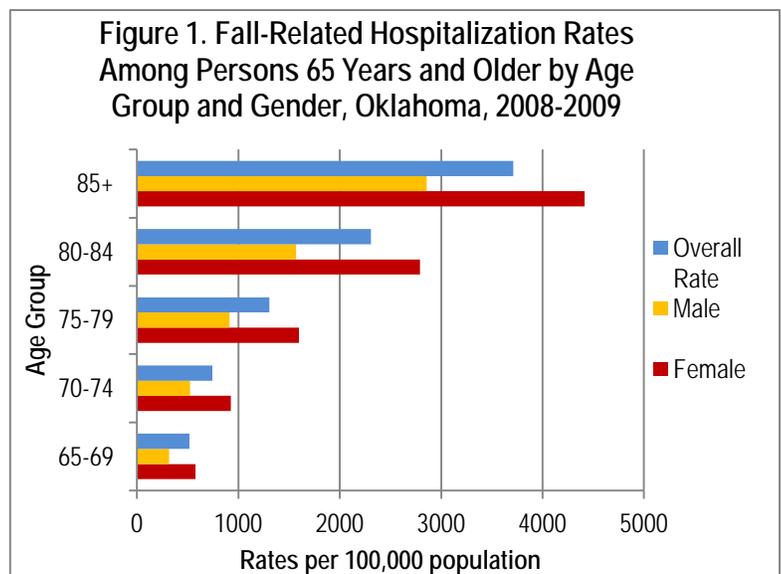
include discharges from all acute care, nonfederal hospitals in the state. Data include readmissions and transfers. During 2008 (latest year available), 265 persons age 65 and older died as a result of a fall.

Women age 65 and older were almost two times more likely than men to be hospitalized due to a fall (Figure 1). Risk of dying from a fall was equal for men and women. For both injuries and fatalities from falls, persons over age 80 were at greatest risk, regardless of gender.

Falls are a preventable injury. Risk factors for falls include poor physical health or fitness, medication side effects, uneven walking surfaces, obstacles in and around the home, lack of stair rails, unstable elevated work areas like ladders, walking on ice, and fear of falling.

CASE BRIEFS

- An 81-year-old male tripped while walking outside his home and struck his forehead. He was discharged to home with home health care and outpatient rehabilitation.
- A 92-year-old female tripped and fell at home while putting clothes on a hanger. She fractured her hip and was discharged to a skilled nursing facility.
- A 76-year-old female lost her footing and fell off a curb, hitting her head. She was discharged to an inpatient rehabilitation facility.



*The INJURY UPDATE is a publication of the Injury Prevention Service, Oklahoma State Department of Health. This and other IPS information may be obtained from the Injury Prevention Service, Oklahoma State Department of Health, 1000 N.E. 10th Street, Oklahoma City, OK 73117, 405-271-3430 or 1-800-522-0204 (in Oklahoma). IPS publications are also available at <http://ips.health.ok.gov>

PREVENTING FALLS AND INJURIES

Physical Health and Fitness

- Stay active by walking and exercising as appropriate, eat a nutritious diet, and avoid obesity.
- Do physical therapy to improve balance while standing or walking, use a cane or walker, get your ears and eyes checked regularly, and monitor your blood pressure.
- Take your time while doing tasks (e.g., use caution when getting up from a sitting or lying position, get your balance before walking).
- Talk to your doctor/pharmacist about medications that may cause dizziness, nausea, or tiredness.
- Avoid alcohol and drug use.

Avoiding Hazards in the Home

- Make sure every room is well lit.
- Floors should be free of obstacles and have even, non-slip surfaces.
- Remove small carpets and electrical cords from the floor.
- Staircases should be well lit, in good repair, have a rail and be free of clutter.
- Put frequently used items on shelves that can be reached easily without using a step stool.
- Keep a telephone and any walking aids within easy reach.
- Install a toilet that has a higher seat and safety rails.
- Bathtubs or shower stalls should have non-slip mats.
- Install grab bars in the shower and bath area. Use a bath transfer bench if you have difficulty climbing in or out of the bathtub.
- If possible, subscribe to a medical monitoring alert system and wear the call button at all times.

Avoiding Hazards Outside the Home

- Keep steps in good repair and install handrails.
- Keep sidewalks clear and in good repair.
- Keep the yard even and free of hoses, gardening materials, and sporting equipment.
- Organize garages and tool sheds to be easily accessible and clear of obstacles or debris.
- Do not go out on ice unless absolutely necessary. Wear appropriate footwear and carry a cell phone when walking in inclement weather.
- When shopping, attending church, or visiting other homes, use the same safety habits you use at home: wear appropriate shoes, hold onto rails, use caution while walking and climbing stairs, and avoid icy or slippery surfaces.

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