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News Release

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Falls a Major Risk for Injury, Death Among Seniors

(Salt Lake City, UT) – Falls are the leading cause of injury-related deaths and traumatic brain injuries for older adults living in Utah. Every day, an average of nine Utahns aged 65 and older are hospitalized for injuries due to a fall. In 2013, there were 3,200 fall-related hospitalizations among older Utahns, costing more than \$123 million in treatment charges. The Utah Department of Health (UDOH) reminds everyone that injuries from falls are largely preventable.

“Falls are not a normal part of aging,” said Sally Aerts, a physical therapist and Falls Prevention Specialist at the UDOH. “A few key practices, like removing hazards from the home and practicing strength and balance exercises, can prevent falls and keep older adults living independently.”

The UDOH recommends six basic steps to reduce the risk of falls:

- **Begin a regular balance and exercise program.** Exercise and balance programs, such as Enhance Fitness, Tai Chi, and Stepping On, have been shown to improve balance and reduce the risk of falls.
- **Talk to your health care provider.** Ask for an assessment of your risk of falling and share your history of recent falls.
- **Review your medications with your doctor or pharmacist.** Some medication side effects can cause you to fall. Take medications only as prescribed.
- **Have your vision and hearing checked annually.** Your eyes and ears are key to maintaining balance. Get these checked and update your eyeglasses annually.
- **Make your home safer.** Remove tripping hazards like throw rugs and clutter, increase lighting, and make stairs safe. Install grab bars in key areas, such as next to your toilet and shower.
- **Talk to your family members.** If you are an older adult, enlist your family’s support in taking these simple steps to stay safe and independent. If you are a family member, encourage the older adults in your family to take these steps.

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To raise awareness about the issue, Governor Gary R. Herbert has declared September 23, 2015 Falls Prevention Awareness Day. Utah will join 48 other states in celebrating the day. Local agencies across the Wasatch Front will host free events to help seniors remain active and reduce their risk of falling. Activities include one-mile walks, health screenings, fitness demonstrations, and medication reviews.

“Preventing falls is crucial for staying active and independent as one ages,” said Aerts. “Many people who fall, even if they aren’t injured, will develop a fear of falling and begin to limit their daily activities. This can lead to decreased mobility, loss of physical fitness and strength, and actually places them at a higher risk of falling in the future.”

For more information about how to prevent falls or for a list of falls prevention classes near you, visit <http://www.health.utah.gov/vipp/older-adults/falls/>.

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The mission of the Utah Department of Health is to protect the public's health through preventing avoidable illness, injury, disability and premature death, assuring access to affordable, quality health care, and promoting healthy lifestyles.