



Department of Health
140 County Highway 33W
Suite 3
Cooperstown, NY 13326
Phone: (607) 547-6483
Fax: (607) 547-4385

NEWS RELEASE
Winter Pedestrian Safety

When conditions are right, wintertime walks can be exhilarating. However, snowy sidewalks and icy streets can turn a safe stroll into a dangerous activity. Many injuries result from falls on slippery surfaces, warns Sue Smith of the Otsego County Department of Health.

During and after a snowstorm, residents should keep their steps and walkways as free of snow as possible to keep them from becoming ice-covered. If sidewalks become dangerous, or if there are no sidewalks, pedestrians may be forced to walk in the street. Walking in the street may present its own hazards. Road surfaces may make it hard for motorists to stop at traffic signals or to slow down. Drivers may also be distracted by snow-covered signs and landmarks. When this happens, pedestrians are at risk of getting hit by a motor vehicle.

“Older adults should be especially careful while walking outside in the winter. An older person’s risk for falls increases if he or she has dementia, impaired vision or impaired hearing,” she said.

Falls are more likely for people who have limited flexibility and coordination, as well as adverse reactions to some medicines. Falls are a leading cause of traumatic brain injuries, and among older adults falls are the leading cause of injury deaths.

This winter, follow these safe walking tips:

- Wear shoes or boots with non-slip soles. Also, wear reflective or bright-colored clothing, such as a hat or scarf, so motorists are better able to see you.
- If you have to walk in the street, face traffic and stay as close to the curb as possible.
- Follow all traffic signs and signals.
- Before you step off the curb, make sure any oncoming vehicles have come to a complete stop.

- Be aware of your surroundings. A covered patch of ice or a pothole filled with snow may cause a slip or fall.
- Bend your knees a little and take slower steps to limit your chances of falling. Wear gloves to avoid putting your hands in your pockets. Avoid carrying heavy packages which may affect your balance and block your view.
- If you are pushing a child in a stroller in the road, put the stroller in front of you and as close to the curb as possible. Dress children in reflective or bright-colored clothes.
- Hats or scarves that cover your ears can also distort or eliminate the muffled sounds of approaching vehicles. Keep warm, but make sure that you can hear what's going on around you.

For more information about pedestrian safety, call the Otsego County Department of Health at (607) 547-4230 or visit the New York State Department of Health web site at www.nyhealth.gov.

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