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DEATHS FROM FALLS IN LEE MORE THAN DOUBLE STATE AVERAGE

Fort Myers, FL--Injuries and death from a fall are twice as likely to occur to Lee County seniors as elsewhere in the state of Florida, and the Lee County Injury Prevention Coalition (IPC) wants that to change.

"Falls are preventable," said IPC Chairman Lowell Gerson. "Seniors and their younger visitors can make changes today to reduce their own and their loved ones chances of falling," Gerson said at a recently held Fall Prevention Summit sponsored by the IPC, partners including the Area Agency on Aging, Lee County Health Department, Lee County Public Safety and the Lee Memorial Health System.

Falls are the leading cause of deaths from injury for older people, according to the CDC. Last year, Florida Department of Health (FDOH) records show 122 seniors died as a result of a fall. That's four times as many as died in motor vehicle incidents. Those same records show Lee seniors make almost 4,000 visits to the emergency department and nearly half of them are admitted to the hospital.

Traffic crashes regularly make the news, but falls are a much more serious problem for seniors, said Gerson.

The number of deaths from falls in Lee County has been climbing by an unusually high rate for the past 10 years, indicate FDOH data. In one year Florida averages a little more than nine seniors in 100,000 dying from a fall, but in Lee County more than 21 in 100,000 are dying.

Serious injury and death from falling is not limited to seniors. The risk of falling increases around the holiday time because more people are climbing ladders, schedules are busier and people are multi-tasking while moving about.

"Falls are not a normal part of aging," added Gerson. "People beginning in their 40s can do things to prepare their bodies to prevent falling as they age. Seniors, even those with low mobility, can start fall prevention activities immediately with very simple steps. Today is the perfect time to begin."

While family and friends visit the homes of the 65 and older population for the holidays, they can make a quick check of the house to remove common hazards and add prevention tools. Use the following checklist:

- Remove all throw rugs
- Eliminate loose cords (electrical or curtain)
- Remove clutter from floors and pathways throughout home
- Add night lights to bath room, bedroom, kitchen and all paths in between
- Add support rails, if needed to tub/shower and steps
- Schedule an appointment to have vision checked
- Encourage senior to begin a regular exercise program to maintain muscle tone and balance

For more information on preventing falls go to www.leecountyinjuryprevention.org click resources and follow the links under falls.