

Falls Among Older Adults in Colorado

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Introduction

Fall-related injuries are a serious health problem, especially for older adults. In the U.S., unintentional falls are the third leading cause of injury-related death for all ages, and the number one cause of injury-related deaths for those 65 years and older.(1) For Coloradans of all ages, falls are the leading cause of injury-related hospitalization and the third leading cause of injury-related death.(2)

Fall-related injuries are costly in monetary terms, and have a negative impact on family life and independence, especially for older adults.

- The average length of a hospital stay for Coloradans, ages 65 and older, hospitalized for fall-related injuries is 4.7 days with an average total hospital charge of \$15,073.
- Each year in Colorado, hospitalization charges for older adults for fall-related injuries total more than \$132 million.
- Fall-related injuries can also lead to decreased functional independence. Of the older adults who were injured and hospitalized due to a fall in a home, only 27 percent were discharged to a home after their hospitalization.(2)

Methodology

This fact sheet examines the reported history of falls and associated health risk behaviors for Coloradans over age 45 using 2003 data from the Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System (BRFSS). The Colorado BRFSS is an ongoing statewide random digit-dial telephone survey of noninstitutionalized Coloradans ages 18 and older regarding their health behaviors and preventive health practices. The sample consisted of 2,222 respondents over the age of 45, and the data are weighted to develop statewide estimates.

Incidence of Falls

- Falls are a fairly common occurrence. Fourteen percent of Colorado adults over age 45 reported that they experienced a fall in the previous three months.
- Older adults over age 64 were just as likely to experience a fall as the 45–64 year old age group.
- Almost 40 percent (36.6%) reported that their fall-related injury limited their activities for at least one day, or led them to seek medical attention.
- Colorado adults over age 45, with incomes less than \$25,000, are significantly more likely to be injured or restricted by a fall than those adults with incomes \$25,000 and over. This may have particularly negative consequences for these Coloradans since individuals with lower incomes are less likely to have health insurance, or may work in occupations that do not provide sick leave or family assistance.

References

- (1) www.cdc.gov/ncipc/WISQARS
- (2) www.cdphe.state.co.us/pp/injepi/elderfalls.pdf
- (3) www.cdphe.state.co.us/pp/injepi/InjuryinColorado/injuryincolorado.html
- (4) Colorado Health Information Dataset (CoHID): www.cdphe.state.co.us/cohid/
- (5) www.ccdc.gov/ncipc/factsheets/falls.htm

Additional information

For more information about injury prevention in Colorado, please visit the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment's Injury and Suicide Prevention Program Web site at www.cdphe.state.co.us/pp/injuryprevention/injuryprevhom.asp

The Colorado Physical Activity and Nutrition Program's (COPAN) Older Adult Resource Kit for Physical Activity & Nutrition is available at www.cdphe.state.co.us/pp/COPAN/grants/OAResourceKit.pdf

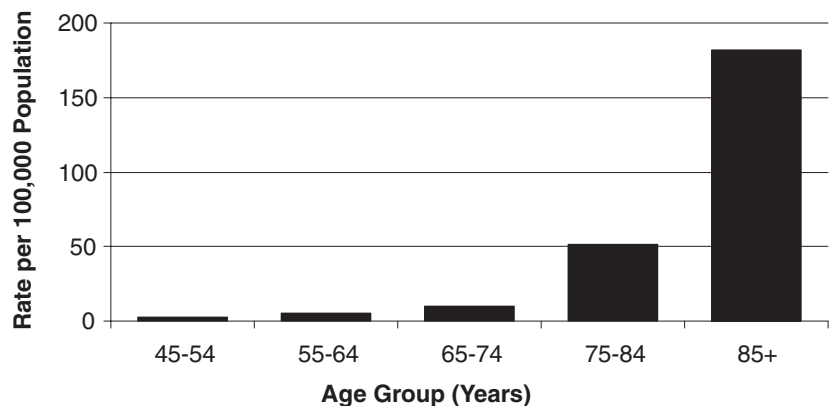
For national information, visit CDC's National Center for Injury Prevention and Control Web site at www.cdc.gov/ncipc or the National Resource Center for Safe Aging Web site at www.safeaging.org

For more information on the Colorado BRFSS, visit the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment Web site at www.cdphe.state.co.us and click on *Health and Disease Statistics*, or contact the Health Statistics Section at the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment, 303-692-2160.

Falls among older adults

- Colorado adults over age 74 are significantly more likely to report a fall than those who are ages 65-74.
- The incidence of falls does not vary among older Colorado adults diagnosed with some of the major health conditions common to aging (diabetes, high blood pressure, arthritis, insufficient physical activity, and heart disease). However, the severity of injury, length of medical stay, and negative outcome may be greater for older adults with certain medical conditions.
- While the self-reported rate of falls does not vary between adults ages 45-64 and those ages 65 and older, the rates of fall-related deaths and injuries do increase as age increases.(3)

Death rates for injuries due to falls, by age group, Colorado residents, 1999-2001



Source: Colorado Health Information Dataset (CoHID)(4)

Fall Prevention for Older Adults (5)

The most effective fall prevention programs include multiple components and individual attention to the particular needs of each older adult.

- Exercises that improve lower body strength and balance reduce the risk of falls and fall-related injuries.
- Older adults should have their doctor or pharmacist review all medications to reduce side effects and interactions.
- Older adults should regularly visit their health care providers to be evaluated and treated for chronic conditions that may contribute to falls, and to receive regular vision checks.
- Since most fall injuries occur in or around the home, it is important to assess the home for hazards and modify the home as needed.