

Preventing Slips, Trips and Falls for Seniors and Vulnerable Adults

Seniors and vulnerable adults are the backbones of many ministries; they are relied upon to volunteer or serve in leadership roles, and many are employees at the church. According to the National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, there are more than 8.7 million people injured from slip, trip and fall incidents in the U.S. every year; of these, more than one in three are over the age of 65. The natural aging process can impact eyesight, hearing, and reflexes. These factors combined with other maladies or medications that may cause dizziness or imbalance can make seniors more susceptible to falling. Insurance Board offers options for consideration to help ensure their safety and prevent injury.

WHY DO SLIPS/TRIPS/FALLS OCCUR?

The good news is that slips, trips, and falls are largely preventable through inspections and preventive maintenance. First, let's consider why most slips, trips and falls occur:

- Slips happen because of a lack of friction or traction between the footwear we are wearing and the walking surface.
- Trips occur when your foot strikes or hits an object which causes you to lose your balance.
- Falls can occur from a height or on surfaces that are on the same level. A fall can be the result of a slip or a trip when the center of gravity is shifted causing someone to lose their balance.

COMMON CAUSES OF SLIPS, TRIPS AND FALLS

Learn about common causes of slips, trips and falls so your ministry can reduce the likelihood of incidents occurring at your facility:

- Foreign substances: Additional substances on the surface can adversely affect slip resistance. Substances that make surfaces easier to slip on include ice, water, liquids, and grease. Always make sure to keep entrances clean and dry, and thoroughly clean the kitchen floor after cooking.
- Surface conditions: Raised/recessed/cracked sidewalks or curbing, potholes in parking lots, loose carpeting, tile that is loose or broken, holes on the surface, stair treads that are loose or peeling, or unlevel flooring. Make repairs as soon as possible; waiting may cause the issue to worsen, thereby making repairs more costly.
- Level changes: Floor or exterior walking surface height changes. Ramps used for persons with disabilities should have a slope no greater than 1:12 rise/run or 4.8 degrees with new construction or updates. Inspect any flooring transitions and consider changing colors of walls where the transition occurs. Additional concerns include steps or stairs, and curbing that is too high. Six-inch curbs are the standard for most jurisdictions, but ministries should check local ordinances and verify city code requirements.
- Obstructions: This includes any items that can impede a walking path or make it easier to slip, trip or fall: extension cords, rugs or mats without non-skid bottom, clutter, hoses, parking lot bumpers, speed bumps, or temporary storage areas close to walkways. Any obstructions should be removed as soon as they are identified.
- Visibility: Consider how easy is it to see the walking surface. This goes beyond just lighting. Is there any glare, shadows, bright or dim lighting that could make it more difficult for someone to see where they are walking?
- Footwear: Shoe choices vary greatly from person to person. Certain shoes and walking surfaces make it easier for a person to slip and fall. Suggesting employees and volunteers wear specific non-skid, rubber soled, low heeled shoes when performing duties or tasks can help decrease the risk of falling.



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- **Stairs:** Stairs that have more than three steps can be a major source of falls and typically result in serious injury. Most falls on stairs often occur while descending. Ensure handrails are secure and easily grasped. Stair treads should be slip resistant and well-maintained; loose or peeling stair treads should be repaired immediately.
- **Ladders:** Make sure you choose the right size and style ladder for the task you wish to accomplish and that the ladder is not damaged. Additionally, you should adhere to any weight limitations which applies not only to the person who will be climbing the ladder, but any protective gear and tools or equipment that will be used while on the ladder. Whenever possible, relying on licensed contractors for any work requiring ladders is the safest option for members of your congregation.
- **Unusual features:** This includes anything that might distract a person walking through the area: alarms/buzzers, flashing lights, high pedestrian and vehicle traffic, signs, information boards, displays, large windows, and decorative lighting.

Other Considerations For Seniors and Vulnerable Adults:

- Stay physically active; getting regular exercise can improve flexibility and strength.
- Having vision and hearing tested. Even small changes in sight and hearing can contribute to someone falling.
- Learning about the side effects of medications or the impact of combining certain medications.
- Getting enough sleep.
- Limiting alcohol intake. Even a small amount of alcohol can impact balance and reflexes.
- Standing up slowly. Getting up too quickly can cause blood pressure to drop which results in balance issues.
- Using an assistive device if needed to help steady walking. Appropriate use of canes and walkers can help prevent falls.
- Wearing non-skid, rubber-soled, low-heeled shoes.
- Inviting a healthcare provider to speak about ways to maintain flexibility and mobility.

For More Information About Falls and Falls Prevention:

Insurance Board

<https://www.insuranceboard.org/safety-central/preventing-slips-trips-falls/>

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)

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