VERMONT **DEPT. OF DISABILITIES, AGING & INDEPENDENT LIVING**
DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH

For Immediate Release: September 30, 2020

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Stay Strong and Independent by Preventing Falls

WATERBURY, VT – Each year, many Vermonters experience a fall, and only half will tell their health care provider. A fall can cause an injury, limit a person's mobility and independence, and increase social isolation. But although falls are a leading cause of injury and death among people age 65 and older, they are preventable.

"Falls are not a normal part of aging, but as we get older, we are at a higher risk of falling and becoming injured by a fall due to weakening muscles, impaired hearing and vision, and even side effects from prescription medications," said Health Commissioner Mark Levine, MD.

The good news is that falls are preventable – by taking steps to reduce risks, and working with your health care provider to stay on top of your personal health.

"We are all aging – and staying healthy and safe is the key to aging well," said Department of Disabilities, Aging and Independent Living Commissioner Monica Caserta Hutt. "There are small but important efforts to prevent falls that are key to maintaining our quality of life and to remaining active and independent as we get older."

Older Vermonters are encouraged to self-assess. Ask yourself: Have you fallen in the past year? Do you feel unsteady when standing or walking? Do you worry about falling? These questions can help determine your risk of falling. Talk to your health care provider if you answer 'yes' to any of these questions.

Dr. Levine said the COVID-19 pandemic means older Vermonters should take extra care to avoid injury. "Being injured can make you more susceptible to illness, including the COVID-19 virus. We want everyone to know the simple things they can do to stay safe and healthy"

Follow these steps to help prevent falls:

- **Talk to your health care provider about any past falls**, even if they didn't lead to an injury. Review your medications and any side effects. Consider Vitamin D supplements.
- **Have your vision and hearing checked every year** and update eyeglasses and hearing aids as needed.
- **Get moving!** Go for a walk, do some at home exercises, or try Tai Chi, which has been proven to improve balance and strength. Find free or low-cost classes at www.fallsfreevermont.org. Many are now being offered online.
- **Assess your home environment.** You can reduce your fall risk by removing trip hazards, improving lighting and installing handrails and grab bars.

For more information about falls prevention and healthy aging:

- Vermont Area Agencies on Aging Help Line: 1-800-642-5119
- Falls Free Vermont: fallsfreevermont.org and facebook.com/FallsFreeVT/
- Vermont Department of Health: healthvermont.gov/emergency-preparedness-ems/injury-prevention/prevent-falls
- Vermont Department of Disabilities, Aging and Independent Living's Adult Services Division asd.vermont.gov/
- National Council on Aging: ncoa.org/healthy-aging/falls-prevention
- MyMobility Plan – CDC resource to help plan for health aging: cdc.gov/motorvehiclesafety/pdf/older_adult_drivers/CDC-AdultMobilityTool-9.27.pdf

Use #FPAD2020 to join the conversation on social media.

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About Falls Free Vermont: Falls Free Vermont is part of the national Falls Free Initiative, led by the National Council on Aging and including 43 states. By providing statewide resources, raising awareness and increasing education and training, the coalition seeks to reduce preventable falls and fall-related injuries and deaths among older Vermonters. The Coalition is co-chaired by Southwestern Vermont Council on Aging and the Department of Disabilities, Aging and Independent Living and includes over 25 organizational members. For more information, visit: www.fallsfreevermont.org and https://www.facebook.com/FallsFreeVT/.