

The SMP SCOOP

PROTECT DETECT REPORT

WINTER 2025

The Senior Medicare Patrol (SMP) Scoop is prepared by the GWAAR SMP Team to help Medicare beneficiaries and their advocates prevent, detect, and report health care fraud, abuse, and errors.

Please feel free to share this publication with others who may benefit from its contents.

TO CONTACT WI SMP

Call: (888) 818-2611

E-mail: smp-wi@gwaar.org

Website: www.smpwi.org

Facebook:

@WisconsinSeniorMedicarePatrol

To subscribe, please send us an e-mail.



Older Americans and Medicare Call Scams

Resourced by Federal Communications Commission

Medicare and health insurance scammers frequently target older Americans. Bad actors may spoof the number that appears on your caller ID so that an incoming call seems to be from a government agency or a health provider that you already know and trust so you'll be more likely to answer the call.

If you pick up and the caller asks for personal information, such as your Medicare card number, your Social Security number, or other health insurance identification, it is most likely a scam call. If you get a call like this, hang up immediately!

Be Aware

- Medicare does not call you uninvited and ask you for personal or private information.
- You will usually get a written statement in the mail before you get a phone call from a government agency.
- Calls requesting health insurance information should not be trusted.

[Medicare.gov](https://www.medicare.gov) urges you to **take the following precautions:**

- Never give your Medicare card, Medicare number, Social Security card, or Social Security number to anyone except your doctor or people you know should have it (like insurers acting on your behalf or people who work with Medicare, like your [State Health Insurance Assistance Program](#) (SHIP)).
- Do NOT accept offers of money or gifts for free medical care.
- Do NOT allow anyone, except your doctor or other Medicare providers, to review your medical records or recommend services.
- Never Join a Medicare health or drug plan over the phone unless YOU called Medicare.
- If someone asks you for your information, for money, or threatens to cancel your health benefits if you don't share your personal details, hang up and call 1-800-MEDICARE (1-800-633-4227) or visit [medicare.gov](https://www.medicare.gov).
- [Report Medicare fraud and abuse](#)

The Wisconsin SMP program is supported, in part by grant number 90MPPG0102-01-00, from the U.S. Administration for Community Living, Department of Health and Human Services, Washington, D.C. 20201. Grantees undertaking projects under government sponsorship are encouraged to express freely their findings and conclusions. Points of view or opinions do not, therefore, necessarily represent official Administration for Community Living policy.



PROTECT DETECT REPORT

Older Americans and Medicare Call Scams

continued from page 1

More Tips to Avoid Scams

- Don't answer calls from unknown numbers.
- If you are being pressured for information immediately, hang up!
- Never give out personal information such as account numbers, Social Security numbers, mother's maiden names, passwords or PINS over the phone.
- If a caller says they are from a health insurance provider or a government agency, hang up and call back using a

phone number on an account statement or an official website.

- If you think you've been scammed, contact local law enforcement immediately.

File a Complaint With the FCC

[File a consumer complaint about robocall scams](#) with the FCC. The [FCC Complaint Center](#) FAQ has more information about how to file a complaint, and what happens after a complaint is filed.

Give the Gift of Making Memories This Holiday Season

By Tiffany Schultz, BBB SW WI Regional Director



Meaningful gifts don't always come in a box. Gifting "experiences" can be an excellent way to create memories that last longer than material goods.

Types of Experiences

Gift the gift of a local adventure. Theaters, concerts, sporting event tickets, waterpark passes, and ski/sledding adventures make great gifts. You can even include a dinner reservation or restaurant gift card to complete the gift.

For the crafty gift recipient, try cooking classes, wine tastings, art workshops, and other types of DIY classes.

Family gifts for the year ahead. If you're shopping for a family with children, look for memberships to local zoos, museums, nature centers, and aquariums. Memberships are usually available monthly or annually. It's the gift that keeps giving beyond the holiday season.

Wrap up wellness and relaxation. Spa gift cards, yoga passes, and fitness classes are all great options for someone who loves to relax and rejuvenate.

For the charitable one. If you have someone in your life who is passionate about giving back, consider donating to their favorite nonprofit or setting up a volunteer day for an event that supports a favorite cause.

How to Shop Smart for These Experiences

Check reviews before buying. Do your research, especially if you are not familiar with the experience. Check [BBB.org](#) and do an internet search to find additional reviews on other platforms. Customer reviews for experience gifts will give you a good idea of whether the experience is worth gifting.

Plan ahead for any holiday-related experiences.

Buy your tickets in advance so they don't sell out.

Purchase directly from the source. It's a good idea to purchase direct instead of going through a third party. Sometimes experiences sold on third-party sites can be scams.

Check restrictions and expiration dates. If you're buying a gift card, voucher or certificate for an experience, communicate any restrictions or expiration dates to the gift recipient so they know when and how to use the gift.

Read refund and cancellation policies. If the event is postponed or canceled, get the details and notify the recipient. If this happens, consider giving a different experience with the refunded money.

Watch for hidden fees. Booking costs and service charges can add up.

Use a credit card, not a debit card. A credit card provides additional protection that other forms of payment may not.

Cold Weather Safety for Older Adults

Resourced from [National Institutes of Health](#)

Older adults have a higher chance of being affected by cold weather. Changes that come with aging can make it harder for older adults to be aware of their body becoming too cold, which can turn into a dangerous health issue quickly.

Hazards of cold weather include falls on wintry surfaces; injury caused by freezing (frostbite); and hypothermia, a medical emergency that occurs when your body temperature gets too low. Being informed and taking certain actions can help lessen risks during the colder months.

Medical Conditions and Cold Weather

Older adults are more likely to have certain chronic medical conditions that make it harder to stay warm:

- [Diabetes](#) can prevent blood from flowing normally to provide warmth.
- [Thyroid problems](#) can affect the body's ability to maintain a normal body temperature.
- [Parkinson's disease](#) and [arthritis](#) can make it challenging to put on more clothes, use a blanket, or get out of the cold.
- [Memory problems](#) can cause a person to forget to take precautions for staying weather-safe, such as wearing appropriate attire.

Some medications can affect body heat, too. These include prescription medications and those bought over the counter, such as some cold medicines. Ask your doctor if medications you take may affect body heat and what you can do.

What is Hypothermia?

Hypothermia occurs when the body's core temperature drops below 95°F. It is often caused by exposure to cold temperatures and can lead to serious health problems, such as arrhythmia (irregular heartbeat), heart failure, and damage to the kidneys or liver. Hypothermia can also occur at cool temperatures (above 40°F) if you become chilled from rain, sweat, or being in cold water.

Hypothermia affects the brain and makes it difficult to think clearly, so people may not realize what is happening and that they need help. It's important to be aware of warning signs and early symptoms, including:



- Cold feet and hands
- Puffy or swollen face
- Pale skin
- Shivering or shaking
- Slowed or slurred speech
- Feeling sleepy, angry, or confused

Hypothermia is a medical emergency. If someone is showing signs of hypothermia, call 911 right away.

Try to move the person to a warmer place, offer them a warm drink, and wrap them in dry blankets, towels, or coats.

If the exposure to cold continues, later symptoms of hypothermia can include stiff and jerky arm and leg movements, slow heartbeat or breathing, loss of consciousness, and eventually, death.

Preventing Unsafe Exposure to Cold Outdoors

Here are some tips for keeping warm when the temperature drops outside:

- Check the weather forecast for windy and cold days. A heavy wind can quickly lower your body temperature. Try to stay inside or in a warm place.
- If you must go out on windy, cold, or damp days, don't stay outside for long.
- Let others know when you're planning to spend time outdoors and carry a fully charged mobile phone.
- Keep warm blankets and extra cold-weather clothing in your car.

Continued on page 4



Cold Weather Safety for Older Adults

continued from page 3

- Wear a hat, scarf, and gloves or mittens to prevent loss of body heat through your head and hands. Also consider using disposable or rechargeable hand- and foot-warming products.
- Wear warm and loose layers of clothing. The air between the layers helps to keep you warm.
- Wear a waterproof coat or jacket if it's snowy or rainy.
- Change out of damp or wet clothes as soon as you can.

Staying Warm Indoors

About 20% of injuries related to exposure to cold occur in the home. Here are some tips to help keep warm:

- Set your heat to at least 68°F. Even mildly cool homes with temperatures from 60 to 65°F can lead to hypothermia in older adults.
- Place a rolled towel in front of doors to keep out drafts.
- Keep your blinds and curtains closed, and if you have gaps around the windows, try using weather stripping or caulk to keep the cold air out.

- Dress warmly on cold days, even if you are staying inside. Wear socks and slippers and make use of throw blankets.
- When you go to sleep, use extra covers. Wear long underwear under your pajamas and consider wearing a head covering.
- Make sure you eat enough food to maintain your weight – some body fat is necessary for staying warm.
- Avoid or limit alcohol intake. Alcoholic drinks can make you lose body heat.
- Ask someone to check on you during cold weather. If a power outage leaves you without heat, try to stay with a relative or friend.

You may be tempted to warm your room with a portable space heater, but some space heaters are fire hazards or can increase the risk of carbon monoxide poisoning. The Consumer Product Safety Commission has more information on the use of space heaters. Read the following for tips on using space heaters safely: [Reducing Fire Hazards for Portable Electric Heaters](#) and [Seven Highly Effective Portable Heater Safety Habits](#).

How to Find Reliable Health Information Online

Resourced from [National Institutes of Health](#)

Many older adults share a common concern: "Can I trust the health information I find online?" There are thousands of medical websites. Some provide up-to-date medical news and reliable health information, and some do not. Choosing trustworthy websites is an important step in gathering reliable health information.

Where Can I Find Reliable Health Information Online?

The [National Institutes of Health](#) website is a good place to start for reliable health information. The [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#) website is another one.



As a rule, health websites sponsored by federal government agencies are accurate sources of information. You can reach all federal websites by visiting www.usa.gov. Medical and health care organizations, hospitals, and academic medical institutions may also be reliable sources of health information.

Continued on page 5

How to Find Reliable Health Information Online

continued from page 4

Your health care provider can also suggest ideal sources of online information. If your doctor's office has a website, it may include a list of recommended links.

Questions to Ask Before Trusting a Website

Searching online, you will likely find websites for multiple health organizations, including many you may not recognize. The following questions can help determine which ones are trustworthy. Many of the answers can often be found in a website's "About Us" section.

1. What is the Purpose of the Website, and Who Owns or Sponsors it?

Why was the site created? Is the purpose of the site to inform or explain, or is it trying to sell a product or service? Understanding the motive of the website can help you better judge its content. The goal of any trustworthy health information website is to provide accurate, current, and useful information versus trying to make a sale.

Knowing who pays for a website may provide you with insight into the mission or goal of the site. For example, if a business pays for the site, the health information may favor that business and its products. Sometimes, the website address (called a URL) is helpful for identifying the type of agency or organization that owns the site. For example:

- **.gov** identifies a U.S. government agency
- **.edu** identifies an educational institution, such as a school, college, or university
- **.org** usually identifies nonprofit organizations, such as medical or research societies and advocacy groups
- **.com** identifies commercial websites, such as businesses and pharmaceutical companies

While many commercial websites do provide accurate, useful health information, it can be hard to distinguish this content from marketing and promotional materials in some cases. Any advertisements on a site should be clearly marked as such. Watch out for ads designed to look like neutral health information.

2. Who Wrote the Information? Who Reviewed it?

Website pages often, but not always, identify the authors and contributors. If the author is listed, are they an expert in the field? Look for health care professionals or scientific

researchers with in-depth knowledge of the topic. Does the author work for an organization and, if so, what are the goals of that organization? A contributor's connection to the website, and any financial stake they have regarding the information on the website, should be made clear.

If the material is not authored by an expert, has the information been reviewed by a health care professional or other credentialed specialist? Dependable health information websites will share sources and citations.

Trustworthy websites will also have contact information — an email address, phone number, and/or mailing address — that you can use to reach the site's sponsor. Look for this information at the bottom of web pages or in a separate "About Us" or "Contact Us" page.

Be cautious about testimonials, individual blogs, and posts on discussion boards. Personal stories may be helpful and comforting, but not everyone experiences health problems the same way. Also, there is a big difference between information written by a single person interested in a topic and a website developed by professionals using researched and peer-reviewed scientific evidence.

No online information, even if it is accurate and trustworthy, should replace seeing a health care professional who can thoroughly evaluate your unique situation and provide specific advice.

3. Is Your Privacy Protected? Does the Website Clearly State a Privacy Policy?

Read the website's privacy policy. It is usually at the bottom of the page or on a separate page titled "Privacy Policy" or "Our Policies." If a website says it uses "cookies," your information may not be private. Cookies are small text files that enable a website to collect and remember information about your visit. While cookies may enhance your web experience, they can also compromise your online privacy, so it is important to read about the information the website collects and how the organization will use it. Many websites will ask you ahead of time if you want to accept cookies, but others may not. If you are concerned about the potential use of information gathered by cookies, you can choose to disable the use of cookies through your internet browser settings.

Continued on page 6



PROTECT DETECT REPORT

How to Find Reliable Health Information Online

continued from page 5

4. How Can I Protect my Health Information?

If you are asked to share personal information, be sure to find out how the information will be used. Secure websites that collect personal information responsibly have an “s” after “http” in the start of their website addresses (https://) and often require that you create a username and password.

Be careful about sharing your [Social Security number](#). Find out why your number is needed, how it will be used, and what will happen if you do not share this information. Only enter your Social Security number on secure websites. You might consider calling your doctor’s office or health insurance company to give this information over the phone rather than providing it online.

Taking these precautions may help protect your information:

- Beware of [health fraud scams](#) and pay attention when browsing the internet. Do not open unexpected links. Hover your mouse over a link to confirm that clicking it will take you to a reputable website.
- Always use a strong password. Include a variation of numbers, letters, and symbols. Some websites may allow you to use a phrase as well. Create a unique password for each website and change it frequently.
- Use two-factor authentication when you can. This security feature requires the use of two different types of personal information to log into your mobile devices or accounts.
- Don’t enter sensitive information over public Wi-Fi. [Learn about how to safely use public Wi-Fi networks](#).
- Be careful about the information you share through social media sites. For example, don’t share personal information, such as where you live or your contact information, on a public channel.

Benefits of Volunteering for Older Adults

By Susan Krolow, SMP Volunteer Coordinator



At SMP, we know firsthand that volunteering isn’t just about giving back – it’s also about feeling good. For older adults, volunteering brings countless rewards for the body, mind, and soul.

Good for the Body

Staying active through volunteer work helps keep us healthy and strong. Research shows that older adults who volunteer often enjoy lower blood pressure, less stress, and even longer lifespans. Whether you’re helping at an outreach event, setting up displays, or connecting with community members, every bit of activity adds up to better overall health.

Good for the Heart and Mind

Volunteering gives us purpose. It feels great to know that your time, talents, and life experience make a difference. Many of our SMP volunteers tell us that helping others boosts their mood, keeps their minds sharp, and provides a sense of accomplishment and fulfillment that’s hard to match.

Good for the Soul

Volunteering connects people in meaningful ways. Through SMP, volunteers build friendships, share laughter, and find belonging in a community that values compassion and service. These relationships are at the heart of what we do – and they’re one of the biggest benefits of volunteering.

When older adults volunteer, everyone benefits. Communities grow stronger, and volunteers gain health, happiness, and a renewed sense of purpose. We’d love to welcome you to the SMP family. Come share your time, your talents, and your heart with us! Together, we can make a real difference.

Lastly, to all our SMP volunteers – thank you for everything you do to support, educate, and protect Medicare beneficiaries across Wisconsin. Your dedication makes a difference every single day, and we’re grateful to have you on our team!

Outreach Activities



Volunteers attended the Wisconsin Counties Association Annual Conference in WI Dells



Participated in the Lewy Body Dementia and the Caregiving Journey event in Oshkosh



Volunteer speaking with an attendee at the Senior Life Expo in Green Bay



Participated in the Senior Enrichment Fair in Menomonee Falls



Volunteer speaking with an attendee at the Marinette Senior Wellness Fair



SMP was invited to the GLNAEA Quarterly Meeting in Bad River



Volunteers participated in the Kewaunee County Senior Resource Fair and took part in the country themed event by wearing western attire



Volunteers attended the Iowa County Health and Wellness Expo in Dodgeville



SMP had a booth at the Cancer Crossroads Conference in Ashland



Outreach Activities



Volunteers attended the AARP Scam Jam in Green Bay



Volunteer speaking with an attendee at the Franklin Adult Health & Wellness Day



Participated in the Age YOUR Way Conference in Chippewa Falls



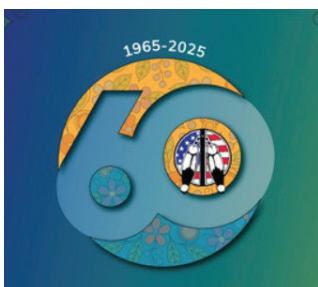
SMP Volunteers attended the Tomah Health's Healthy Aging Expo



Attended the Sample the City and Volunteer Fair at UW-La Crosse



Great Lakes Inter-Tribal Council Celebrates 60 Years of Inter-Tribal Unity



Congratulations to the Great Lakes Inter-Tribal Council (GLITC) on celebrating 60 years of service and advocacy! Since its founding in 1965, GLITC has strengthened the voices of Wisconsin's Tribal Nations through collaboration, leadership, and shared vision. This year's milestone theme, "60 Years of Inter-Tribal Unity," honors the enduring partnerships that continue to advance the health, education, and well-being of Native communities across the Great Lakes region. The Wisconsin Senior Medicare Patrol is proud to partner with GLITC in supporting and empowering Native elders to protect their Medicare benefits. Here's to 60 years of collaboration and continued commitment to the communities we serve!



What's the "Scoop"?

By Ingrid Kunder, SMP Program Director



Here we are, at the start of the winter season in Wisconsin. Are you someone who likes to bundle up and embrace the outdoors or stay indoors by the fireplace with a good book? Either way, we wish you a safe and healthy winter.

Here's the Scoop: Managing your Medicare coverage is easier than ever with a free, secure Medicare.gov account. The Wisconsin Senior Medicare Patrol (SMP) encourages all Medicare beneficiaries who have original Medicare, to set up an account to take charge of their health coverage and protect against potential fraud or billing errors.

Why Create a Medicare.gov Account?

With an online account, you can:

- Review your Medicare claims – See what services have been billed and what Medicare has paid, often before you receive your printed summary notice.
- Check your coverage details – View your Part A and Part B start dates and find information about any current Medicare Advantage or prescription drug plans.

- Compare plans – During Medicare's Open Enrollment period, easily compare coverage and costs to find the best plan for your needs.
- Print or download your Medicare card – Quickly replace a lost or damaged card without waiting for mail delivery.
- Track your prescriptions – Save your medication list and preferred pharmacies to make plan comparisons simple each year.

How to Set Up Your Account

1. Go to [Medicare.gov](https://www.Medicare.gov)
2. Click "Log in/Create Account."
3. Select "Create an Account."
4. Enter your Medicare number and other requested information.
5. Create a username, password, and security questions.

Once your account is set up, you can log in anytime to view claims, coverage, or plan details – all in one convenient place.

Stay Informed and Protect Yourself

Having an online account allows you to check for possible errors or suspicious charges quickly. Reviewing your claims regularly is one of the easiest ways to spot and report potential Medicare fraud, errors, or abuse.

If you notice something that doesn't look right, contact the Wisconsin Senior Medicare Patrol (SMP) for help.

Here's the Scoop on how you can reach us:

Call: (888) 818-2611

E-mail: smp-wi@gwaar.org

Website: www.smpwi.org

Facebook: @WisconsinSeniorMedicarePatrol



Two Florida Men Charged for \$34.8M Fraud Scheme Targeting Medicare Beneficiaries

Resourced from [Office of Public Affairs](#)

An indictment was unsealed Friday charging two Florida men for their roles in a scheme to submit approximately \$34.8 million in false and fraudulent claims to Medicare for medically unnecessary products. As part of the scheme, the defendants and their co-conspirators targeted thousands of Medicare beneficiaries and, through deceptive telemarketing, persuaded them to accept medical equipment that they did not need, such as orthotic braces and continuous glucose monitors.

"The defendants are alleged to have perpetuated a scheme that involved the submission of \$34.8 million in fraudulent claims to Medicare for medically unnecessary medical equipment," said Acting Assistant Attorney General Matthew R. Galeotti of the Justice Department's Criminal Division. "That money, which came from American taxpayers, was intended to benefit Americans in need of medical care. Friday's arrests send a clear message to those who would defraud our healthcare system: the public fisc is not your private purse, and we will aggressively prosecute those who steal from benefit programs."

"Greed-fueled fraud schemes, like billing for medically unnecessary medical equipment, are a threat to both taxpayer-funded health care programs and patients alike," stated Deputy Inspector General for Investigations Christian J. Schrank of the Department of Health and Human Services Office of Inspector General (HHS-OIG). "Working shoulder to shoulder with our law enforcement partners, we will continue to aggressively investigate such allegations to hold fraudsters fully accountable."

According to court documents, Kenneth Charles Kessler III, 42, of Miami-Dade County, Florida, and Michael Andrew Gomez, 42, of Broward County, Florida, are charged in connection with their ownership and operation of seven durable medical equipment (DME) supply companies based in Florida. Kessler and Gomez are accused of paying illegal kickbacks and bribes to purported marketing companies that targeted thousands of Medicare

beneficiaries with deceptive and aggressive telemarketing campaigns. The indictment alleges that these marketing companies obtained the beneficiaries' personally identifiable information and arranged for purported telemedicine companies to generate doctors' orders for unnecessary medical equipment.

Kessler and Gomez allegedly used these doctors' orders to submit false and fraudulent claims to Medicare through their network of DME companies. They are both charged with conspiracy to commit health care and wire fraud, two counts of health care fraud, conspiracy to defraud the United States and to offer and pay health care kickbacks, and two counts of offering and paying kickbacks in connection with a federal health care program. If convicted, Kessler and Gomez each face up to 65 years in prison.

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office of Inspector General and the FBI are investigating the case.

Trial Attorneys Aisha Schafer-Hylton and Owen Dunn of the Criminal Division's Fraud Section are prosecuting the case.

The Fraud Section leads the Criminal Division's efforts to combat health care fraud through the Health Care Fraud Strike Force Program. Since March 2007, this program, currently comprised of nine strike forces operating in 27 federal districts, has charged more than 5,800 defendants who collectively have billed federal health care programs and private insurers more than \$30 billion. In addition, the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services, working in conjunction with HHS-OIG, are taking steps to hold providers accountable for their involvement in health care fraud schemes. More information can be found at www.justice.gov/criminal-fraud/health-care-fraud-unit.

An indictment is merely an allegation. All defendants are presumed innocent until proven guilty beyond a reasonable doubt in a court of law.

Updated September 17, 2025



Get the Facts About Falls Prevention

Resourced from [The National Council on Aging](#)

Key Takeaways

- One in four Americans age 65+ falls each year.
- The financial toll for older adult falls is expected to increase as the population ages. In 2020, nonfatal older adult falls totaled about [\\$80 billion](#) in health care costs.
- Falls can be prevented. NCOA's Falls Prevention Resource Center and the Falls Free® Initiative promote effective falls prevention strategies for older adults.

Most of us know someone who has experienced a fall, or we have fallen ourselves. Falls are the leading cause of fatal and nonfatal injuries for older Americans.¹ But through practical lifestyle adjustments, evidence-based falls prevention programs, and clinical-community partnerships, the number of falls among older adults can be substantially reduced.

The Challenges of Falls for Older Adults

According to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and other falls research:

- Fourteen million, or 1 in 4 Americans age 65+, falls each year.¹
- Falls are the leading cause of fatal and nonfatal injuries among older adults.²

- In 2021, falls caused 38,000 deaths among those age 65+, and emergency departments reported 3 million visits due to older adult falls.²
- The cost of treating injuries caused by falls among older adults is projected to increase to over \$101 billion by 2030.³
- Among older adults who fall, over half receive care in a hospital; the estimated annual average cost per inpatient visit for falls injuries is \$18,658 and \$1,112 per emergency department visit.⁴
- Based on data from 2020, the total health care cost of nonfatal older adult falls is \$80 billion per year, up from \$50 billion in 2015. Sixty-seven percent of fall-related costs are paid for by Medicare, 4% by Medicaid, and 29% is paid privately/out-of-pocket by older adults and families.⁵

Falls Risk Factors

Get to know these common risk factors for falls. Take the [Falls Free CheckUp](#) to check your falls risk, and talk with a health care provider about how to reduce your risk for falls.

- Falling once doubles the risk of falling again.⁶
- People with vision loss have almost twice the risk of falls as adults without vision impairment.⁷
- People with hearing loss are nearly three times as likely to fall compared to those with normal hearing, but wearing a hearing aid reduces the risk of falling by 50%.⁸
- Lower body weakness and difficulties with walking and balance increase someone's risk for falls.
- Certain medications can have side effects and interactions, such as dizziness and fatigue, that increase the risk of falls.
- Chronic conditions such as diabetes and arthritis can increase the risk of falls due to neuropathy, pain, and other symptoms that can affect walking and balance.⁹
- Hazards in the home, including clutter, poor lighting, and lack of supports such as grab bars, can cause falls. Home modifications can address these hazards to reduce falls risk in the home.¹⁰

Continued on page 12



PROTECT DETECT REPORT

Get the Facts About Falls Prevention

continued from page 11

Falls, with or without injury, also carry a heavy quality of life impact. A growing number of older adults fear falling and, as a result, limit their activities and social engagements. This can result in further physical decline, depression, social isolation, and feelings of helplessness.

NCOA's role

National Falls Prevention Resource Center

The National Council on Aging (NCOA) leads the National Falls Prevention Resource Center, which supports awareness and educational efforts about falls and promotes evidence-based falls prevention programs and strategies across the nation. The purpose of the center is to:

- Increase public awareness and educate consumers and professionals about the risks of falls and how to prevent falls.
- Support and stimulate the implementation, dissemination, and sustainability of evidence-based falls prevention programs and strategies to reduce the incidence of falls among older adults and adults with disabilities.
- Serve as the national clearinghouse of tools, best practices, and other information on falls and falls prevention.

Falls Free® Initiative

The National Falls Prevention Resource Center leads the Falls Free® Initiative, a national effort to address the growing public health issue of falls, fall-related injuries, and deaths. The initiative includes a coalition of over 70 national organizations charged with working toward the progress of one or more of the strategies in the National Action Plan. Members disseminate proven falls prevention programs, advocate for funding and regulatory changes, and educate professionals, older adults, and caregivers about how they can reduce their risk of falling. The initiative also includes a 47-member [State Coalition on Falls Prevention Workgroup](#) charged with collaboratively promoting effective federal, state, and local strategies to address falls.

The Falls Free® Initiative's work includes:

- [Falls Free® National Action Plan](#): In March 2005, NCOA released the landmark evidence-based Falls Free® National Action Plan to prevent falls and fall-related injuries in older adults. The plan was updated in 2015 and continues to serve as a roadmap and catalyst for action. The plan includes goals, strategies, and action steps to increase physical mobility, reduce the impact of medications as a falls risk factor, and improve home and environmental safety. The plan also promotes the expansion and funding of falls risk screening, assessment, clinical interventions, and evidence-based programs.
- [National Falls Prevention Awareness Week](#): Every September, the Falls Free® Initiative promotes National Falls Prevention Awareness Week. States are encouraged to host and promote falls prevention awareness and screening activities to draw attention to the problem and offer older adults practical solutions.

<https://www.ncoa.org/tools/falls-free-checkup/>



RSV in Adults

*Resourced from National Center for Immunization and Respiratory Diseases;
Coronavirus and Other Respiratory Viruses Division*

RSV can be dangerous for certain adults. Each year, an estimated 110,000–180,000 adults ages 50 and older in the United States are hospitalized due to RSV. In general, the risk of severe RSV illness rises with increasing age and if you have certain risk factors.

Risk Factors That Increase the Risk for Severe RSV

Adults at highest risk for severe RSV disease include:

- Adults ages 75 and older
- Adults with chronic heart or lung disease
- Adults with weakened immune systems
- Adults with certain other underlying medical conditions
- Adults living in nursing homes
- For the complete list of medical conditions and risk factors for severe RSV disease, see [RSV Clinical Overview](#).

Severe RSV

When an adult gets RSV, they typically have mild cold-like symptoms, but some may develop pneumonia (an infection in the lungs). Adults who get very sick from RSV may need to be hospitalized. Severe RSV can be fatal for some adults.

RSV can sometimes also lead to worsening of serious conditions such as:

[Asthma](#)

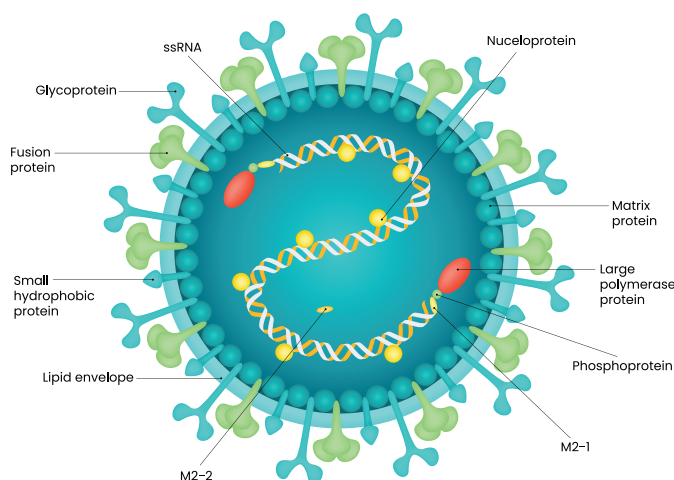
[Chronic obstructive pulmonary disease \(COPD\)](#) – a chronic disease of the lungs that makes it hard to breathe.

[Heart failure](#) – when the heart can't pump enough blood and oxygen through the body

Who Should Get an RSV Vaccine

CDC recommends an RSV vaccine for all adults ages 75 years and older and for adults ages 50–74 years who are at [increased risk of severe RSV](#).

RSV (Respiratory Syncytial Virus)



Risk Factors That Increase Your Risk for Severe Illness Include:

- Chronic heart or lung disease
- Weakened immune system
- Certain other medical conditions
- Living in a nursing home

For a complete list of medical conditions and risk factors that lead to increased risk of severe RSV, see [Clinical Overview of RSV](#).

Each year, respiratory viruses are responsible for millions of illnesses and thousands of hospitalizations and deaths in the United States. The good news is there are actions you can take to help protect yourself and others from health risks caused by respiratory viruses.

Reducing Risk

Respiratory illnesses can make anyone sick. However, some people have risk factors that can increase their chances of getting very sick (severe illness). If you are, or if you spend time with someone, at higher risk for getting very sick, these prevention strategies are especially important.

Continued on page 14



PROTECT DETECT REPORT

RSV in Adults

continued from page 13

Core Prevention Strategies

Core prevention strategies are essential practices recommended for everyone. They provide a foundation of protection for you and your loved ones:

- Stay up to date with recommended [immunizations](#). Talk to your doctor or trusted healthcare provider about what may be recommended for you and your family.
- Practice good [hygiene](#) like washing your hands regularly and cleaning commonly touched surfaces.
- Take [steps for cleaner air](#) when possible in places where people live and work.

When Sick With a Respiratory Illness:

- Use [precautions to prevent spread](#). Stay home and away from others.
- Seek health care promptly for treatment if you have [risk factors for severe illness; treatment](#) may help lower your risk of severe illness.
- Additional prevention strategies.

Additional prevention strategies are extra measures you can choose that can further reduce your risk of

respiratory illness. They can provide an extra layer of protection and can be especially important in certain settings or when illnesses are increasing in your community.

[Wearing masks](#)

[Physical distancing](#)

[Tests](#)

You may not be aware of the things that can make others more vulnerable to serious illness. If you are unsure about the health condition or risk status of those around you, the most protective option is choosing to use these additional prevention strategies.

Key Times for Prevention

All of the prevention strategies described in this guidance can be helpful to reduce risk. They are especially helpful when:

Respiratory viruses are causing a lot of [illness in your community](#). One thing to remember, though, is that vaccines take time to work. It's best to get vaccinated before viruses start spreading in your community. You or the people around you were recently exposed to a respiratory virus, are sick, or are recovering. You or the people around you have [risk factors for severe illness](#).



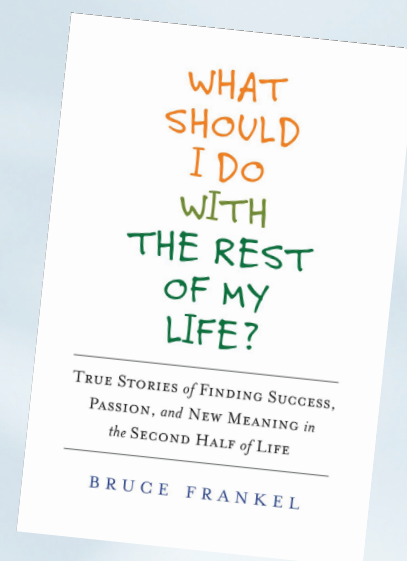
As the year comes to a close, we extend our heartfelt thanks for your continued support of the SMP program. We're especially grateful for our incredible team of volunteers whose dedication and service make our work possible.

Wishing you a joyful holiday season and a happy New Year!

Book Recommendation:

What Should I Do With the Rest of My Life?: True Stories of Finding Success, Passion, and New Meaning in the Second Half of Life

By [Bruce Frankel](#)



In today's world, the question "What should I do with my life?" only scratches the surface. Now, more and more people – from Baby Boomers retiring from their "first act" to people in their 40s and 50s reconsidering their careers in a recovering economy – are finding themselves wondering how to find new stimulation and meaningful work over a lifetime. Bringing together a diverse array of stories, veteran journalist Bruce Frankel brings to life a mesmerizing series of profiles of men and women who discovered a new calling, success, or purpose later in life. Brimming with inspiration and humanity, *What Should I Do with the Rest of My Life?* celebrates activists, artists, entrepreneurs, filmmakers, and others who found extraordinary ways to experience true fulfillment in the second half of life.

IMPORTANT RESOURCES FOR WISCONSIN MEDICARE BENEFICIARIES

- Benefit Specialists at local **Aging and Disability Resource Centers (ADRCs)** and aging units in every county and tribe offer benefits counseling. For contact information, visit www.dhs.wisconsin.gov/benefit-specialists/counties.htm
- Contact **Medicare** directly by calling **(800-633-4227)** or visiting <https://www.medicare.gov>
- The **Medigap Helpline (800-242-1060)** is a toll-free helpline operated by the Wisconsin Board on Aging and Long-Term Care that provides counseling for all Wisconsin Medicare beneficiaries on Medicare, Medicare supplement insurance, employer-based health insurance, Medicare Advantage plans, long-term care insurance, and related topics.
- The **Wisconsin Medigap Part D and Prescription Drug Helpline (855-677-2783)** is a toll-free helpline that answers questions from Wisconsin residents aged 60 and over about Medicare Part D and other prescription drug coverage options.
- **Office for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (video phone: 262-347-3045)** provides outreach and individual counseling in American Sign Language.
- **Judicare Legal Aid (800-472-1638)** provides outreach and benefits counseling to low-income persons living in Northern Wisconsin and Native Americans statewide.
- The **Wisconsin Senior Medicare Patrol (888-818-2611)** has a toll-free helpline for Medicare beneficiaries and their families to call to report suspected Medicare fraud, errors, and abuse.





Preventing Medicare Fraud

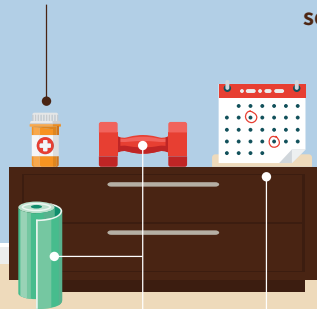
1414 MacArthur Road, Suite A
Madison, WI 53714

PRSRT STD
US POSTAGE
PAID
MADISON WI
PERMIT #2783

Six Tips To Help Prevent Falls

More than one in four people age 65 years or older fall each year, yet many falls can be prevented.

Talk with your health care provider about medication side effects



Do strength and balance exercises

Make your home safer by using night lights, installing grab bars in the bathroom, and securing carpet to the floors

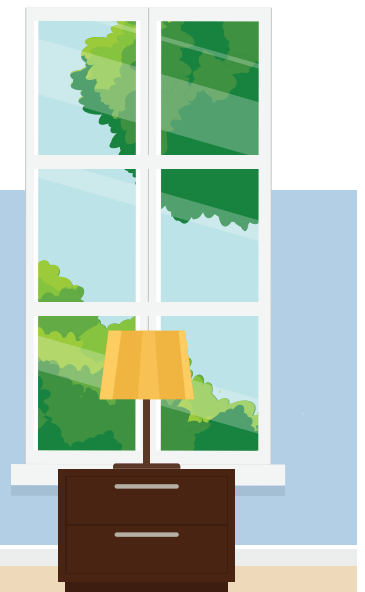


Get your vision and hearing checked regularly

Stand up slowly to avoid dizziness



Use a cane or walker if you need more stability



Learn more about reducing your risk of falling at www.nia.nih.gov/falls-prevention.



888-818-2611

www.smpwi.org

SUPPORTED BY GRANT # 90MPRC0002 FROM ACL

