



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**  
September 23, 2011

## **Falls Continue to be the Leading Cause of Fatal Injuries among Older Adults; City Officials and Community Partners Detail Fall Prevention Initiatives**

- Each year, approximately 300 older adults die in New York City from falls, accounting for nearly half of all injury-related deaths —*
- Physical exercise can mitigate falls risk: NYC life's Sit and Be Fit program encourages older adults to stay in shape —*

**NEW YORK, NY** – In recognition of Falls Prevention Awareness Day, Commissioner of the Department for the Aging (DFTA) Lillian Barrios-Paoli, Commissioner of the New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene Thomas Farley, M.D., M.P.H., and Commissioner of the Mayor's Office of Media and Entertainment Katherine Oliver today detailed initiatives to increase falls prevention awareness among older adults and caregivers, including a new website devoted to falls prevention and the formation of a broad coalition of community partners that will address the issue at the grassroots level. Falls continue to be a leading cause of fatal injuries in the older adult population. Although the risk of falls increases with age, it can be mitigated by steps such as fixing trip and fall hazards in the home, reviewing and eliminating unnecessary medications, getting annual eye exams and staying in good physical shape.

The announcement took place at the Educational Alliance's Sirovich Senior Center, located in Manhattan's East Village. During the event "Sit and Be Fit" host Mary Ann Wilson, RN, led a group of local senior citizens in a group exercise as part of the show's "Fitness Fridays." NYC life, part of the official network of the City of New York, filmed the workout, which is scheduled to air as a future episode in the upcoming season. The engaging exercise series, which airs on NYC life weekdays at 3pm, shows ways seniors can maintain their physical health and help to prevent falls. These falls prevention efforts are part of the Age-friendly NYC initiative, a set of 59 programs aimed at making New York City the most livable city in the nation for older New Yorkers. Mayor Michael R. Bloomberg in a proclamation declared the day Falls Prevention Awareness Day in New York City.

"Certain medications increase the risk of falling and some combinations can pose the same danger. With more than one quarter of older adults regularly using five or more medications, older New Yorkers need to talk with their doctors about whether they still need to take all of them. If you're an older New Yorker, ask your doctor to review all your medicines – including herbals, supplements and over-the-counter medicines – to see if they put you at risk and ask if they can be stopped," said Commissioner Farley.

“As the number of older adults in New York City grows, it becomes increasingly important that seniors become aware of the simple measures they can take to minimize the risk factors that can cause a fall,” DFTA Commissioner Barrios-Paoli said. “Physical activity can help older adults improve balance and prevent falls. Older New Yorkers take pride in the ability to live independently, and this education and awareness effort will make it safer for them to continue to do so.”

There are more than 1.3 million older New Yorkers living in the city today. This number is expected to grow by 46% by 2030, potentially increasing the number of falls. Every year New York City emergency departments treat more than 24,000 older adults for injuries due to falls while hospitals admit almost 18,000 older adults for fall-related injuries. Each year, approximately 300 older adults die in New York City from falls, accounting for nearly half of all injury-related deaths.

“Part of our mission to inform and educate New Yorkers includes broadcasting entertaining and healthy programming on the City’s TV stations, and we’ve certainly found a fan favorite among our senior viewers with ‘Sit and Be Fit,’” said Commissioner Oliver, Mayor’s Office of Media and Entertainment. “This is a terrific example of working with other City agencies to really maximize our reach. We want to thank Mary Ann Wilson for being a special part of today’s event as well as the Department for the Aging, the Department of Health and Mental Hygiene and NYC & Company.”

“A little bit of information can go a long way,” said New York City Council Aging Committee Chair, Jessica Lappin. “Not only will the Falls Prevention Coalition help seniors stay on their feet, it will prevent injuries for people of all ages.”

As a part of the initiative, a coalition of community based organizations, academic institutions and city agencies was formed to address falls prevention. The mission of the coalition is to bring attention and solutions to the issue of falls among older adults. Members of the coalition include AARP (New York City Chapter), the Brookdale Center on Aging, the Health and Hospitals Corporation, the Mayor’s Office for People with Disabilities, the Martha Stewart Center for Living, the New York Academy of Medicine, Public Health Solutions, St. John’s College of Pharmacy, the Touro College of Pharmacy, the United Hospital Fund, VISIONS Services for the Blind and Visually Impaired, and the Visiting Nurse Service of New York (VNSNY). The NYC Falls Prevention Coalition is supported by a grant from the Fan Fox and Leslie R. Samuels Foundation.

Coalition members are promoting falls prevention awareness activities within their respective membership communities. For example, VISIONS will host a falls prevention seminar for its volunteers and program participants. It will focus on techniques to limit falls risks among those with visual impairments.

The coalition recently launched a new web site, <http://www.nyc.gov/html/doh/html/win/older-fall2.shtml>, which includes links falls prevention brochures, checklists, demographic information on falls risks, as well as other resources. Steps to prevent falls include:

- Talking to your health care provider about an appropriate exercise plan that focuses on balance, strength and flexibility.
- Having your vision checked regularly and reviewing medications with your health care provider.
- Reviewing your medications with your healthcare provider to reduce the risk of falling.
- Fixing slip and trip hazards in your home such as improper lighting, excess clutter or unsecured rugs and wires.
- Joining one of DFTA's 256 senior centers to take advantage of free health and wellness programming.

Health care providers who serve older adults can learn more about these important issues in the Health Department publications, "[Preventing Falls in Older Adults in the Community](#)" and "[Age-Friendly Primary Care](#)," both available at [nyc.gov/health](http://nyc.gov/health).

Today's exercise class, "Sit and Be Fit," is part of a national television series designed to improve the quality of life of older adults and physically limited individuals through safe, effective exercises. The series actively promotes functional fitness, healing and independence. Each chair exercise program is carefully researched and designed by Mary Ann Wilson, RN, and a team of physical therapists, doctors and exercise specialists. The series has earned a loyal following due to its effectiveness in profoundly improving the health and wellness of older adults, seniors, and kids, as well as physically limited individuals and those managing chronic conditions and chronic pain. "Sit and Be Fit" has been broadcast since 1987 on PBS stations to more than 82 million U.S. households annually, and is recognized by the National Council on Aging as a "Best Practice" program in health promotion and aging. Locally, the series airs weekdays at 3pm on NYC life (Channel 25). An additional "Sit and Be Fit" group exercise, led by Mary Ann Wilson, is scheduled to take place on Friday, September 30 at Tavern on the Green, located off of 67<sup>th</sup> Street and Central Park West in Manhattan, at 10a.m.

The Age-friendly NYC effort, first announced in August 2009 by Mayor Michael R. Bloomberg, City Council Speaker Christine Quinn and New York Academy of Medicine President Jo Ivey Boufford, MD, is a blueprint for promoting active aging focused on four areas: community and civic participation; housing; public spaces and transportation; and health and social services. Age-friendly NYC fulfills a promise made by Mayor Bloomberg in his 2008 State of the City address to make New York a World Health Organization Age-friendly City. In recognition of the City's efforts, the World Health Organization in June 2010 recognized New York as the first member of its Global Network of Age-Friendly Cities. The Age-friendly NYC report can be found at [nyc.gov/aging](http://nyc.gov/aging). For more information on healthy aging, visit [nyc.gov/health](http://nyc.gov/health).

###

#### **MEDIA CONTACTS:**

Susan Craig /  
Chanel Caraway (Health)  
(212) 788-5290  
[PressOffice@health.nyc.gov](mailto:PressOffice@health.nyc.gov)

Christopher Miller /  
Jeanette Reed (Aging)  
(212) 442-1111  
[jreed@aging.nyc.gov](mailto:jreed@aging.nyc.gov)

Chris Coffey  
Marybeth Ihle (MOME)  
(212) 669-7322  
[ccoffey@cityhall.nyc.gov](mailto:ccoffey@cityhall.nyc.gov)