

Winter Slips and Falls

Winter conditions can be dangerous. Snow and ice create hazards, including slippery conditions. Slips occur when there is less friction or traction between your shoes and the walking surface, resulting in a loss of balance and potentially a fall, which can result in serious injuries.

Here at Northwestern, in the past 5 years, there have been 21 reported slips and falls on ice, primarily in parking lots and on sidewalks, resulting in hand, arm, shoulder, head, knee, and hip injuries. It's important to be aware of winter hazards to protect yourself and others.

Did you know?

When temperatures rise above 32°F, ice will start to melt, but it may persist, especially in shady areas. If temperatures drop, melting snow and ice can re-form as visible or black ice creating slippery conditions you may not expect.

Keep your guard up and stay alert during these times!



Tips for Success When Talking to Your Team

Preparation is Key: Keep the topic relevant. Work with your team to review potential slippery conditions in your work area and discuss how the hazards can be avoided.

Stay Positive: Keep the focus on what can be done to create a safe workplace instead of focusing on what has gone wrong in the past.

Share a Story, Ask for a Story: Storytelling is a powerful method to convey information. Stories from your employees make the topic even more relatable.

Tips for safely navigating icy conditions

- ✓ Check the local forecast regularly so you know when to expect snowy and icy conditions.
- ✓ Avoid walking outside when icy conditions are known to be present, unless it is necessary. Try to wait until later in the day when the sidewalks can be salted and ice melts.
- ✓ To maintain balance, hold onto something while entering or exiting vehicles, and keep your hands out of your pockets while walking.
- ✓ Look in front of you while walking to assess potential slip hazards, and never run.
- ✓ If icy conditions are present, walk on snow or grass along the side of the sidewalk for additional traction.
- ✓ When ascending and descending stairs outdoors, always utilize the handrail to maintain balance.
- ✓ Choose footwear with good traction to reduce the chance of falls.
- ✓ Take shorter steps, walk at a slower pace, and waddle like a penguin, keeping your feet below you to help maintain your balance. This provides more time to react to changes in traction.
- ✓ When entering buildings, remove snow from your footwear to avoid creating slippery conditions for others!

Avoiding conditions that could potentially cause a fall is always the goal, but if you are about to fall, the following tips can help minimize injuries:

- ❖ **Bend your knees.** This will reduce the distance of your fall and minimize how much force will be generated.
- ❖ **Keep your arms away.** Your natural reaction may be to use your arms to catch yourself, but it often results in broken arms or wrists. Instead, cross your arms over your chest, or angle them away from your body so they aren't crushed by the weight of the fall.
- ❖ **Fall onto your side.** If you can, try to fall on the side of your body to protect your back, head, face, and arms.
- ❖ **Tuck your head to your chest.** This will help protect your head from hitting the ground.

Report all injuries on Risk Management's [website](#) or call (847) 491-5582.

Learn more: Review [OSHA's winter weather guidelines](#).

Safety at Home

Below are tips to help keep you and your family safe at home in the winter:

- Clear and salt snowy and icy driveways and walkways to avoid falls.
- Choose an ergonomic shovel, and when possible, push snow instead of lifting it to prevent overexertion.
- Use the proper lifting technique to avoid injuries: keep your back straight, lift with your legs, and do not turn or twist your body. Review the [Back Injury Prevention](#) Spotlight on Safety for more information.

For Additional Information

Contact Environmental Health & Safety at ehs@northwestern.edu

Do you or your team have a safety story you'd like to share? Contact Environmental Health and Safety for details.