

# Fact Sheet

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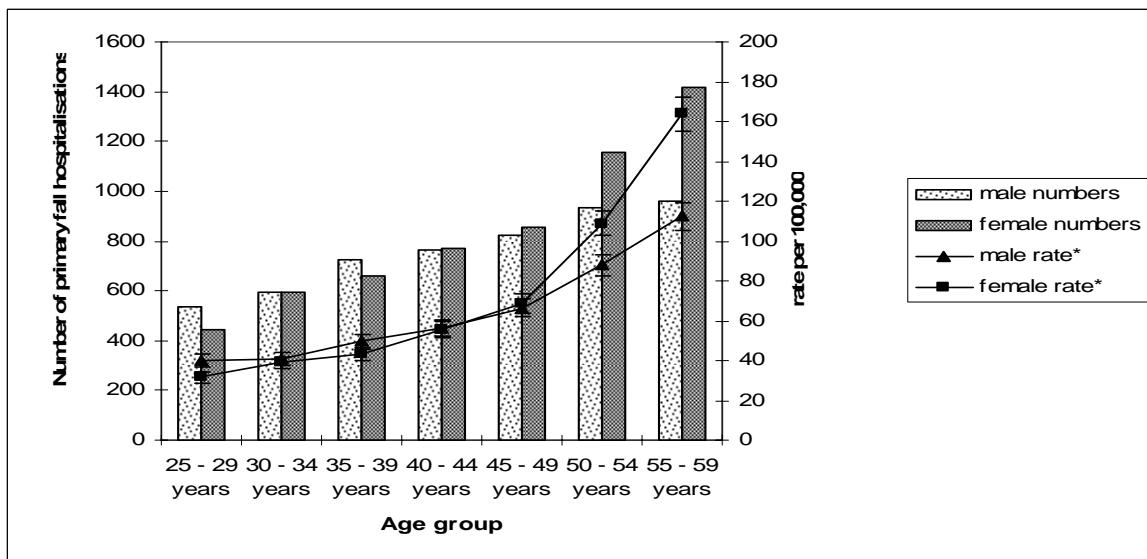
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## unintentional falls at home among 25 – 59 year-old New Zealanders

### Background

Falls account for a significant burden of injury in New Zealand. New Zealand self-reported injury data indicate nearly a third of injuries occur within the home.<sup>1</sup> Falls among the elderly have received considerable research attention. In contrast, falls among people of predominantly working-age (25 to 59 years) have received very little attention. In 2004, the 25-55 year age group accounted for over 50% of the \$150 million in ACC claims for moderate to serious falls in the home.<sup>2</sup>

This fact sheet summarises findings from a review of unintentional home fall-related fatality data and primary public hospital admission data for 25 to 59 year olds, collated by the New Zealand Health information Service (NZHIS).<sup>3</sup>



**Figure 1: Primary injury hospitalisations for unintentional falls at home by age group, New Zealand, 1993 – 2004, n= 11,236. \* Rates per 100,000 with 95% confidence intervals**

### Public hospital admissions (overnight stay or longer):

- 40,370 New Zealanders aged 25 to 59 years had a primary (first admission) public hospital admission for an injury caused by an unintentional fall, during the 12-year period 1993 to 2004, 28% (n=11236) of these occurred at home.
- The mean age of hospitalised cases was 44.9 years. 12% of cases were classified as people of Maori ethnicity and 3% Pacific.
- Rates of hospitalisation increased three to four-fold across the age range (fig.1).
- Male rates were higher than female rates until 45 years of age.
- Falls *on the same level* were responsible for almost a third of hospitalisations, and falls *involving stairs or steps* accounted for 19%.
- Males were four times more likely to fall from *a building or structure* or from *a ladder or scaffolding* than females.
- Females were almost twice as likely to fall on the same level as males and to have a fall involving stairs or steps.

### Injury deaths:

- 281 New Zealanders aged 25 to 59 years died from unintentional fall related injury during the 10-year period 1993 to 2002, 26% (n=73) of these falls occurred at home.
- The mean age of victims was 47.6 years. There were insufficient deaths to examine ethnic differences.
- People aged 55 to 59 years old age had nearly a three times higher rate than people aged 25 to 29 years.
- The fatality rate for males was three times that for females.
- The most common type of fall was *falls from buildings or structures* (n=19).
- Men were most likely to die as a result of a fall from *a building or structure*.
- Females were most likely to die as a result of a fall involving stairs or steps.

### Summary

Almost one third of unintentional falls resulting in-patient admission or death among working age people in New Zealand occur at home. Deaths from falls at home are uncommon in this age group. For every death there were approximately 150 in-patient primary admissions. Rates of hospitalisation due to fall-related injury at home increased three to four-fold across the age range. The steady increase in rates of injury from about 45 years of age onwards suggests that consideration should be given to commencing fall prevention initiatives at an earlier age than has traditionally been the case. The potential adverse impact on economic productivity from falls of this nature in this age group is significant. Future research is needed to identify modifiable risk factors that can be targeted to reduce the burden of these injuries and their consequences.

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### References

1. Coggan C, Hooper R, Adams B. Self-reported injury rates in New Zealand. *New Zealand Medical Journal* 2002;115(1161):U167.
2. Injury Statistics ACC data warehouse. All new and ongoing fall entitlement claims at home. 25 – 55 years. Wellington: Accident Compensation Corporation, 2005.
3. Kool B, Ameratunga S, Jackson R, Robinson E. Hospitalisations and deaths due to unintentional falls at home among working-aged New Zealanders. *Injury* 2007; In press. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.injury.2006.10.014> .