

School Talk

Material Safety Data Sheet



School Risk-Control: Exposure to Falls Due to Ice and Snow | Part of the Eyes on Pathway Risk Group

What are they?

Falls due to ice and snow describes winter weather fall exposures that typically occur in parking lots and on sidewalks. There are other similar fall exposures, like from spills or tracked-in water, but we will focus here on outdoor falls only.



What is their impact?

Ice and snow related falls could result in a wide-range of injuries from sprains and bruises to closed head injuries. Here, *slips* are most prevalent and will typically result in musculoskeletal injuries to the wrists, head, neck, back, or buttocks. Winter weather and early darkness may compound risks to sufferers of serious injuries in parking lots who may be unable to get up and self-rescue unless help is near.

Why does it happen?

Full exposure to the elements makes a parking lot one of a school's more hazardous places. An ice and snow-related fall is typically the result of an individual's at-risk behavior while walking. That is, for whatever reason, an employee is either not focusing on *where* they are walking, are unable to *see* their pathway, or are taking shortcuts over or through unsafe conditions, like:

- Patches of ice, or black ice.
- Unplowed or unshoveled walks.
- Landscape or lawn areas.
- Poor visibility.
- Freezing rain and standing water.



Examples of at-risk behaviors that lead to falls on ice and snow include:

- Shortcuts over or through hazardous conditions, like landscaping, ice, or water.

- Walking backwards.
- Not focusing on where you are stepping.
- Hurrying or running.
- Carrying an object that obstructs your view of the pathway.
- Being distracted and not paying attention to your surroundings.
- Wearing improper footwear for the conditions.
- Carrying too much making balancing difficult.

Does it happen?

Absolutely. In fact, falls that occur on ice and snow are a very common source of slip, trip, and fall injuries in quantity (frequency) and in degree of injury (severity).

What can we do about it?

There are several simple things you can do right now to minimize your exposure to falls from stairs injuries.

- **Always focus on where you step.** Winter conditions in parking lots can change rapidly. Watch where you are stepping to allow you to observe hazardous conditions.
- **Do not carry items that block your view of the pathway.** Take additional trips if needed.
- **Park near a light source,** if possible, in the early morning or nighttime hours to help you better see unsafe conditions.
- **Manage your time to avoid running** or hurrying.
- **Walk on the pavement.** Avoid shortcuts over lawn or landscaping that can become slippery or a tripping hazard.
- **Avoid other simultaneous activities** like reading while walking.
- **Wear appropriate footwear.** We recommend a low-heeled, rubber-sole shoe for all condition traction.
- **Choose a safe path.** Take the time to step around an unsafe condition, like ice, instead of through it.
- **Help others.** If you see a hazard that you can fix, fix it. Otherwise, report observed unsafe conditions for correction.
- **Communicate.** If you observe someone placing themselves at-risk of a parking lot fall, let them know.