

Mount Sinai Medical Expert Offers Winter Walking Tips

Winter officially started December 21 at 1:08 a.m., Eastern Standard Time and with the first snow and ice having already hit the ground, it would seem a good time to review some basic tips on how to walk on slippery surfaces to help pedestrians avoid injuries.

While no technique is 100 percent effective for walking in cold, wintry conditions, a few suggestions for slogging through the ice, snow and slush for the holiday season and beyond from Dr. Ronald Grelsamer, a hip and knee specialist at the Mount Sinai Department of Orthopaedics in New York City, follow.

1. Move your feet ever so slightly apart as you walk. This will give you better balance. If the street is really slippery, bend your knees a little bit. You may feel that you look funny, but it's worth it!

2. When going down an incline, consider turning sideways. Do not cross one foot over the other, as you will have no balance while your feet are crossed. If the ground is steep, bend your knees. (This is where those annoying ski lessons can pay off.)

3. Protect your dominant arm—the right if you are a righty, the left one if you are a lefty. Since a fall occurs very quickly, you have no time to plan for that. One recommendation is to hold your coat with your dominant hand, which instinctively leaves the other one to break your fall. If you are carrying something, do so with the dominant hand. Again, instinctively, you will then use the weaker hand to brace yourself, should you fall.

"You can never be too careful, particularly since we haven't had this type of weather in quite a while," Grelsamer commented. "People should also pay special attention when exiting trains, buses and cars, because you never know what the sur-

face will be like until your feet hit the ground, especially at night."

The Department of Orthopaedics at Mount Sinai School of Medicine is committed to the treatment and prevention of physical handicaps in all patients, the furthering of orthopaedic knowledge through research and to the teaching of medical students and orthopaedic residents. The entire staff is deeply involved in the accomplishment of these goals.

Consumer Debt Clinic Opens At Queens Civil Court

Residents of Queens County will soon have a new resource to assist them in dealing with consumer debt cases in Civil Court. On Friday, January 25, "CLARO" will be opening at Queens Civil Court. CLARO which stands for the Civil Legal Advice and Resource Office, will be a legal advice clinic for people representing themselves in consumer debt cases. CLARO will be staffed by pro bono volunteer attorneys from the Queens County Bar Association's Volunteer Lawyers Project and by students from the St. John's University School of Law. The implementation of the program has had the cooperation and assistance of the Legal Aid Society, Queens Civil Practice, Attorney-in-Charge April A. Newbauer and Supervising Judge of Queens Civil Court the Hon. Bernice D. Siegal, although court personnel will not be involved in clinic services.

CLARO, which has been in operation in Brooklyn for two years, has been successful in assisting the huge and ever-increasing number of people facing consumer debt cases in New York City. An overwhelmingly large number of these people cannot afford to retain a private attorney and low-income legal service providers are not equipped to deal with the size of this problem. Elderly persons, single mothers, persons with low-level English proficiency, and low-income people are forced to represent themselves pro se against collection agency attorneys who have vastly greater knowledge of the Civil Court debt collection process and dangerously greater bargaining power. CLARO attempts to remedy this inequity. Rather than attempt representation of just a relative handful of these debtors, the limited resources available are maximized by offering debtors the assistance of CLARO, a free walk-in clinic that provides legal advice on how these individuals can best represent themselves.

Beginning from 2 to 4 p.m. on Friday, Jan. 25, 2008 and every Friday thereafter at Queens Civil Court, 89-17 Sutphin Blvd., Jamaica, Room 116, CLARO volunteer lawyers and law students will provide information and advice to self-represented litigants in an attempt to demystify the legal process and alleviate some of the anxiety experienced by the pro se litigant. Attorneys interested in volunteering for Queens CLARO should call Mark Weliky at (718) 291-4500.

MRSA, Homeless Issues Highlight Borough Cabinet

BY THOMAS COGAN

Happy New Year exchanges marked the beginning of the first Queens Borough Cabinet meeting of 2008, and then Borough President Helen Marshall led the cabinet efficiently through four items. The first of them addressed the MRSA health issue, in an attempt to allay fears that a plague of deadly infection could be circulating. The other items were about heat and hot water complaints, the Homeless Outreach Population Estimate (HOPE) and the Queens Preparedness Conference for Faith.

MRSA stands for methicillin resistant Staphylococcus aureus, or resistant Staph. Because of at least one death from the infection recently, and because that victim was a child, fear of an uncontrollable disease endangering children has arisen and been publicized. At the meeting, Melissa A. Marx, identifying herself as a career epidemiology field officer of the Centers for Disease Control and working for the city Department of Health and Mental Hygiene, said that while the Brooklyn child's death was sad, there is no indication that many such deaths will follow. Staph, she said, is present on the skin or in the nasal passages of perhaps one person in five and is not normally toxic. Additionally, perhaps 1 percent of those persons carry MRSA, the resistant Staph, with no ill effects, Marx noted. Staph, she said, adapts and eventually can become resistant to treatments designed to kill it. Penicillin-resistant Staph was first noticed in the 1960s, the methicillin-resistant kind in the 1980s—so MRSA has been around for more than 20 years, and indeed, was responsible for the deaths of four children in the Midwest in a 1990s occurrence, she said. Resistant Staph infections have long been a problem in hospitals, but the current concern is mainly for community-associated MRSA (CA-MRSA), of which the Brooklyn incident was an example. CA-MRSA might be spreading, but in fact the picture in New York is not clear at present, Marx said.

Through a PowerPoint presentation she explained that MRSA infections can emerge on the skin looking like pimples or boils. Infections are contracted by skin-to-skin contact involving at least one infected party. They can usually be treated by simply cleaning and covering the infected area. An antibiotic regimen is necessary if fever is present and infection persists. What is paramount, Marx said, is cleanliness, of body and furniture surfaces. Don't touch infected areas, Marx said, and don't share personal items such as towels and razors.

There might have been a long question period accompanying Dr. Marx's presentation, but Marshall was determined to move the meeting along, and the epidemiologist soon yielded to a housing official. Mario Ferrigno, assistant commissioner, Department of Housing Preservation and Development, talked about the procedure

for resolving heat and hot water complaints. He said that from the beginning of the heating season in October until the end of December, 472 heat-related violation citations were issued in Queens.

This year's Homeless Outreach Population Estimate takes place Monday night and early Tuesday morning, January 28 and 29, beginning at 10:30 p.m. and running to 4 a.m. Jay Bainbridge, an assistant commissioner for policy and research at the Department of Homeless Services, said the department seeks volunteers to canvass streets, parks and subway stations and trains, identifying and interviewing the homeless persons they find. In Queens, more than 200 areas will be covered, including 28 subway stations. The aim is to get the homeless off the streets and into shelters. Bainbridge said that such tracking of the homeless has helped reduce street homelessness in Queens by

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44 percent since 2005.

The last item was the Queens Preparedness Conference for Faith Leaders, whose spokesman was Calder Yates, an interfaith outreach coordinator from the Office of Emergency Management. This is to be an all-day event held some time in March, though at the moment an exact date has not been set. Its purpose is to connect faith leaders with elected officials and disaster organizations such as the city Office of Emergency Management to prepare plans of action for the time when natural forces or political enemies inflict a serious blow upon New York. Yates used a hurricane as an example, saying that a storm comparable in force to the one in 1938 or the more recent Katrina is certainly coming to New York. The conference should feature scenario exercises, workshops and panel discussions about advance preparations and what to do when the disaster arrives. Yates said that anyone coming to the conference should be prepared to spend all day there.

Meningitis Kills Queens School Counselor

A 27-year-old student counselor at St. Francis Preparatory H.S. last week died of bacterial meningitis sending fear of contamination through the Fresh Meadows school.

Leanne Burke, a guidance counselor at St. Francis Prep, died after she took a turn for the worse while battling the disease at North Shore University Hospital, authorities said.

Health officials described symptoms of the disease as a high fever, intense headache and vomiting accompanied by a stiff neck and body rash.

Authorities said Burke appeared to be improving on Thursday evening, but her condition worsened rapidly overnight and she died shortly after 6 a.m. on January 25.

The disease often fools its victims, appearing as a bad case of the flu, authorities said. Symptoms become more severe as the disease lingers.

Officials at St. Francis Prep were unavailable for comment.

—Liz Goff