



University of Wisconsin
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Washington among Wisconsin's Healthiest Counties

2012 County Health Rankings show Wisconsin counties a roadmap to improve health

Madison, Wis., and Princeton, N.J. – Washington County residents are among the healthiest in Wisconsin, according to the *2012 County Health Rankings* released today by the University of Wisconsin Population Health Institute and the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation.

The *County Health Rankings* rank the overall health of nearly every county in all 50 states using a standard way to measure how healthy people are and how long they live. This year's *Rankings* include several new measures, such as how many fast food restaurants are in a county and levels of physical inactivity among residents. Graphs illustrating premature death trends over 10 years are also new.

Wisconsin's six healthiest counties are St. Croix, Ozaukee, Taylor, Iowa, Vernon and Washington. The five counties in the poorest health are Menominee, Marquette, Milwaukee, Adams, and Jackson. The least healthy counties are primarily located in rural areas of central and northern Wisconsin with the exception of Milwaukee County, the state's most urban county, in the southeast.

"The *Rankings* remind us that there is a lot more to health than health care alone. Where we live, learn, work, and play matters to our health," says Dr. Patrick Remington, associate dean for public health at the UW School of Medicine and Public Health. "This annual county health check-up is bringing local leaders together to identify where they are doing well and where they should take action to get better."

Washington County ranks in the top quartile of Wisconsin counties for health factors (6th) and health outcomes (6th). Washington County also ranks in the top quartile for health behaviors (15th), clinical care (7th) and social and economic factors (7th).

Linda Walter, Washington County health officer said, “Obesity continues as a priority area needing attention in the 2011-2015 Community Health Improvement Plan. Proactive planning to address obesity includes: promotion of community gardens; support for farmers’ markets; a community support group for breastfeeding (protective for obesity); a new website at www.getmovingwashingtoncounty.com that identifies free local physical activity opportunities in the county; and a broad-based community coalition of public and private partners, Healthy People Project of Washington County, that has been working together successfully since 2006.”

The *Rankings*, available at www.countyhealthrankings.org, include a snapshot of each county in Wisconsin. University of Wisconsin Population Health Institute researchers used five measures to assess the level of overall health for each county: premature death, the percent of people who report being in fair or poor health, the number of days people report being in poor physical and poor mental health, and the rate of low birth weight infants.

The *Rankings* also outline the factors that contribute to a community’s health within four categories: health behavior, clinical care, social and economic factors, and physical environment. The health factors the researchers looked at include: rates of adult smoking, adult obesity, physical inactivity, excessive drinking among adults, and teenage births; the percent uninsured under the age of 65; availability of primary care physicians; preventable hospital stays; rates of high school graduation, adults who have attended some college, and children in poverty; community safety; limited access to healthy foods; and air pollution levels.

“The *County Health Rankings* show us that much of what influences our health happens outside of the doctor’s office,” says Dr. Risa Lavizzo-Mourey, president and CEO of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF). “The good news is that businesses, health care providers, government, consumers and community leaders are already joining forces in communities across the nation to change some of the gaps that the *Rankings* highlight.”

The *County Health Rankings* illustrate what we know when it comes to what’s making people sick or healthy. New this year, the *County Health Roadmaps* help counties to mobilize and take action to create healthier places. Taken together, the *Rankings & Roadmaps* help create a healthier nation, county-by-county. To learn what other communities are doing to improve the health of their residents and how your county can develop plans to address health challenges, visit www.countyhealthrankings.org/roadmaps.