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Health survey results to be released

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Rock County to hold two meetings Tuesday>

The results of the Rock County Health Department's Community Health Needs Assessment are in and ready to be unveiled to the public.

The health department will host two community meetings to discuss the survey's findings and to gather input about implementation strategies.

The meetings will be at 8:30 a.m. and 6:30 p.m. Tuesday at the Hedberg Public Library in Janesville. Interested citizens are invited to attend either meeting.

"We are going to give the highlights of the survey and ask for community input about how we meet some of these needs," said Rock County Public Health Officer Karen Cain.

It turns out there are many health needs in Rock County. Although Cain didn't want to release all the details until next week's meeting, she said mental health issues, substance abuse, environmental health and wellness issues were big concerns in Rock County.

Another growing issue she described is a lack of resources and cultural competencies, noting there are many different cultures in Rock County. Not only are their different racial and ethnic groups, but there are also various socioeconomic groups.

"There seems to be a strong feeling that the different cultures in our community are not understood by the health care system. People don't access them because of how they feel they are treated," Cain said.

Poverty is becoming a larger issue with the growing unemployment rate. People who had resources before and have lost them often don't know where to go for health care assistance.

Other issues raised were related to immunizations, access to care, dental care, disabilities, infant mortality, senior citizens services, prescription costs, domestic violence and child abuse.

Cain said the Community Health Needs Assessment was done by the county as a whole for the first time this year.

"A core of community representatives and volunteers have been meeting since October to identify the priority needs of our county," Cain said.

In addition to reviewing existing data such as the Rock County Health Rankings 2008, the health department sent out surveys to different organizations, posted them on its Web site and offered them at the clinics.

According to the Rock County Health Rankings 2008, a report developed by the University of Wisconsin Population Health Institute, the health of a community is determined by a number of factors, such as health insurance, smoking rates, high school graduation and air quality.

However, Rock County ranks in the bottom quartile for health behaviors, socioeconomic factors and

environmental health. For example, socioeconomic factors such as lack of education and employment were high with Rock County ranking at 64 out of 72 counties.

Rock County ranked even lower - 68 out of 72 counties - for health behaviors such as smoking, physical inactivity, drinking, teen birth rates and sexually transmitted diseases.

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