

# Rock County's health behaviors worsen

By GINA DUWE

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## Photo

ROCK, WALWORTH COUNTIES				
Health behaviors	Rock Co.	Rank	Walworth Co.	Rank
Cigarette smoking	28.0%	69	22.7%	49
Smoking during pregnancy	19.2%	45	15.1%	25
Physical inactivity	42.5%	23	46.1%	47
Obesity	27.1%	52	24.0%	37
Insufficient fruit/vegetable intake	78.0%	39	77.9%	37
Binge drinking	26.0%	57	19.2%	75
Motor vehicle crash rate	47.7%	57	37.7%	29
Vehicle crash ER visits rate (on road)*	724	58	781	54
Vehicle crash ER visits rate (off road)*	83	74	196	26
Teen birth rate per 1,000 births	41.7	66	28.7	49
Sexually transmitted disease rate*	493	69	209	44
Violent crime rate*	238.6	61	100.0	37

SOURCE: UW Population Health Institute  
\* Per 100,000 population  
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JANESVILLE — Rock County residents rank at the bottom in the state in health behaviors, while Walworth County residents are near the top, according to a report released Wednesday by the University of Wisconsin.

"We are moving toward the bottom," said Karen Cain, nursing director/interim health director at the Rock County Health Department. "We're not moving up."

Rock County ranked 68th for health behaviors, which include smoking, obesity, physical inactivity, binge drinking and teen birth rate. That's a drop from its rank of 55th a year ago.

Walworth County this year came in at 19.

Cain thinks officials can help individuals make healthier decisions.

"We have to find a way to fix that," she said. "I know education is a huge component of that."

The Wisconsin County Health Rankings is the sixth annual "health check-up" of the 72 counties and the city of Milwaukee. It's developed by the UW Population Health Institute.

The report revealed significant differences between the healthiest places—Ozaukee, Waukesha, Dane, Iowa, and Eau Claire counties—and the least healthy places—Menominee, Marquette, Juneau and Forest counties and the city of Milwaukee.

Rock County showed improvement in two of its biggest problems from last year—nitrates in water and lead poisoned children, ranking 67th and 66th respectively. Last year, the county came in 70th in both categories.

The health department has been addressing those concerns by promoting its water sampling program and lead risk assessments in homes, said Tim Banwell, environmental health director.

But Rock County's rank for "health outcomes," which considers mortality and general health status, dropped for a fourth consecutive year, falling to 56th. Walworth County dropped to 44th from 39th last year.

Among Rock County's worst health behavior rankings:

- Cigarette smoking is at 28 percent of residents, ranking 69th.
- Sexually transmitted disease rate is 493 per 100,000, ranking 69th.
- Teen birth rate is 41.7 per 1,000 births, ranking 66th.

"I'd like to really look at what we can do to increase (the rankings of) some of these behaviors that impact our overall health," Cain said.

The health department is starting its first health needs assessment, she said. She's looking for residents, business people, professionals and organizations to join a committee to identify and prioritize the county's health needs and determine how the health department can meet the needs.

"We know at the health department we can't do it all," Cain said. "It takes a whole community effort to do that."

## **HEALTHY COMMITTEE**

A committee of residents, business people, professionals and health officials to study Rock County's health needs will meet for the first time at 8:30 a.m. Tuesday, Dec. 9, at the Rock County Job Center, 1900 Center Ave, Janesville.

People interested in attending should contact the Rock County Health Department at (608) 757-5440.

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