

For directions on printing or emailing, [click here](#)

Updated: 11/19/2008 11:27:02 PM

Eau Claire County looks good in health survey

By Julian Emerson
Leader-Telegram staff

Eau Claire County residents remain among the healthiest in Wisconsin, thanks in large part to access to quality health care, but they also binge drink more frequently than their counterparts statewide, according to a study released today.

The 2008 Wisconsin Health Rankings report compiled by the UW-Madison Population Health Institute shows a greater percentage of women here (81 percent) receive biennial mammographies than elsewhere in Wisconsin, helping the county rank as the fifth healthiest in the state. That's the good health news.

The bad news? More county residents here (32 percent) report binge drinking, the second-highest percentage among Wisconsin's 72 counties and the city of Milwaukee.

Overall, Eau Claire County fared well in the report. The fifth-place ranking is down from last year, when the county ranked third, but still laudable.

"These results speak well of Eau Claire County," said Paul Loomis, a Luther Midelfort physician and member of the Energize Eau Claire initiative that promotes increased physical activity and improved nutrition.

The study ranked each of Wisconsin's 72 counties on more than 30 health-related measures such as health insurance access, high school graduation rates and air quality.

The overall health ranking was based on the premature death rate (dying before age 75) and the percentage of people who reported being in fair or poor health.

Along with Ozaukee and Waukesha counties, Dane County, home to Madison and state government, ranked as the healthiest.

Menominee County, home of the Menominee Indian tribe in northeast Wisconsin, was once again the least healthy, followed by the city of Milwaukee and Marquette County in central Wisconsin.

Local health officials said Eau Claire County's high ranking is indicative of quality medical care and county residents taking part in healthy activities.

However, the high binge-drinking rate (drinking excessive amounts of alcohol in a relatively short time period) is cause for concern, Loomis said.

Dave Duax, a member of the Eau Claire County Consortium on Alcohol Abuse, agreed binge drinking needs to be addressed.

"(Binge drinking) is a consistent concern of our group, but it is obvious we still have some work to do." Duax said.

Study results are somewhat subjective because 50 percent of scoring on the health outcomes ranking is based on self-reporting, which can contain errors and biased personal assessments by individuals.

Still, the report gives a useful snapshot of the health of the local population, as studies show self-reporting is surprisingly accurate, Loomis said.

Besides the high mammography test figure, Eau Claire County had the third-lowest number of residents who reported receiving poor inpatient medical care and got high marks for providing diabetes treatment. The county also scored well in terms of the percentage of nonsmokers, the number of people considered obese and the percentage eating enough fruits and vegetables.

Scores weren't as high in the health behaviors part of the report, where in addition to the binge-drinking category county residents scored below the state average in the number of motor vehicle crashes, sexually transmitted diseases and violent crimes.

The county also fared relatively poorly in the physical environment area, ranking 40th. The air-quality ranking was low (53rd), as was the percentage of people driving alone to and from work (50 percent).

Other counties in this part of the state had mixed results, according to the survey. For instance, Pepin County scored ninth-best statewide in the health determinants part of the study - which includes such categories as the percentage of residents with health insurance and those receiving poor inpatient care - but only 43rd in health outcomes, which measures the degree of residents' health and mortality rates.