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## Counties high on health list

### Marathon, Wood rank in top 20 in UW report

*By Amy Olson  
For the Marshfield News-Herald*

Three central Wisconsin counties rank among the top quarter in the state for their low rates of premature death and good quality of health, according to a new report.

Marathon, Portage and Wood counties ranked in the top 20 overall, according to the University of Wisconsin's Population Health Institute in Madison. Clark County ranked No. 37, while Taylor County was No. 26.

Researchers looked at rates of death before age 75 and the percentage of people reporting their health status as fair or poor as part of a national health study to determine the health rank.

The intent was to highlight the disparities between counties throughout the state and help communities better assess and improve their health status, said Dr. Patrick Remington, director of the university's Population Health Institute.

"These reports can be used as a call to action," said Dr. Robert Golden, dean of the University of Wisconsin School of Medicine and Public Health in Madison. More must be done to improve people's health behaviors and the physical environment to support good health, he said.

The report uses much of the same data Marathon County uses in its health assessment, but it offers comparisons that can help officials gauge change, said Julie Willems Van Dijk, the county's health officer. Both documents highlight the importance of factors such as education and income and show that health "is bigger than medical care."

Though helpful, the findings are only one tool, said Susan Kunferman, Wood County's health officer.

"We don't put all our eggs in the county health ranking basket," Kunferman said. The findings have prompted Wood County to talk with other counties about their efforts to bolster health in areas where Wood County has lagged.

Though not included in the rankings, the researchers assessed factors such as health care and lack of health insurance, behaviors such as smoking and inactivity, socioeconomic factors and the physical environment.

Marathon, Wood and Portage counties ranked Nos. 2, 3 and 4, respectively for health care; Clark County ranked No. 51, while Taylor County was 64.

Marathon County ranked worst in the state for radon exposure. Some environmental health factors lack context because health officials encourage radon testing knowing the area's history of having high levels of the radioactive gas, Kunferman said.

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