

EAT YOUR VEGGIES!

County ranks in bottom half of state on health stats

By Jeff Hovind
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Lincoln County could do a better job when it comes to taking care of our health, a new study shows.

A comprehensive report released by the University of Wisconsin Population Health Institute shows Lincoln County ranks 41st in the state in "health outcomes," and 55th in "health determinants." The 2008 rankings represent a decline from previous years, but the survey showed there is not major differences in the quality of health throughout Wisconsin.

The health outcomes looked at death statistics and general health status, while the health determinants measured more than 30 of health-related behaviors or factors.

"Research has shown that the health of a community is determined by a number of factors; including the quality of health care, health behaviors, social and economic factors, and physical environment," stated Dr. Patrick Remington, Director, Population Health Institute.

The study determined Lincoln County residents suffer an average of 5.6 years of potential of life lost, which is just below the state average of 6.0 years. In terms of general health status, 15 percent of county residents report fair or poor health, which is higher than the state average of 13.2 percent.

The research shows that while 12 percent of the county population does not have any health insurance coverage, just 2.1 percent do not receive needed health care. Statewide, 7.4 percent

of the population is uninsured and 2.2 percent do not receive care.

The report was released by the state and the Lincoln County Health Department on Thursday.

"Our community's health plan, Healthy People Lincoln County, focuses on ways to improve upon the health of Lincoln County residents. By working together we can make our community a healthier and safer place to live," Shelley Hersil, Director of the Lincoln County Health Department, said.

Lincoln County is currently addressing some of the key issues that can improve health for many residents, she said in a written release. For example, community partners are working together to reduce obesity and increase physical activity by promoting wellness in workplaces and collaborating with food service facilities to offer more healthy food options.

The rankings show that 47 percent of county residents engage in some type of physical activity, while 28 percent are considered obese. That's 4 percent higher than the state average. When it comes to diet, one of the more striking findings is that about 83 percent of county residents don't eat enough fruits and vegetables, one the lowest rankings in Wisconsin.

Among other bad habits, 23 percent of county residents smoke, and that includes 24 percent of women who smoke during pregnancy. About a quarter of residents report doing some binge drinking, which is slightly higher than the state average of 23 percent.

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More than 30 percent of residents do not see a dentist annually, while 25 percent see their dentist statewide.

When it came to social and economic factors, Lincoln County ranked high (10th) in the number of students completing high school and fared well in the percent of children in poverty (10 percent compared to 12 percent statewide) divorce rate (8.5

percent ranked 27th), and single-parent households (7.5 percent). Our unemployment rate of 5.6 percent is slightly higher than the state average of 4.9 percent.

Lincoln County air quality ranked 39th in the state, excess nitrates in water was ranked high at 81 percent (69th) and the radon risk of 16 percent of the homes ranked 68th in the state.

By way of comparison, Hersil noted that Wisconsin lags behind our neighbors, such as Minnesota, and she attributed the difference to spending on health care. "While Minnesota ranks second in the

nation in health, Wisconsin has been fallen in recent years," she said. "Our state spends about \$7 per person for public health and ranks 47th in the nation. Minnesota spends seven times that amount and it shows in its health outcomes."

For more information about Healthy People Lincoln County, visit www.co.lincoln.wi.us or call the Health Department at 536-0307. For more information on the health rankings, visit http://www.pophealth.wisc.edu/uwphi/research/rankings_2008/rankings_2008.htm.

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