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## Lincoln County ranks 41st in state health survey

*By Amy Olson  
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Lincoln County received a relatively low ranking in a new health report as a result of a high percentage of people having reported their health status as fair or poor.

The county ranked No. 41 in the ranking of 72 counties and the city of Milwaukee released Thursday by the University of Wisconsin's Population Institute. The institute examined measures including how people reported their health status and the rate of premature death -- defined as people who died before age 75 -- to determine the ranking.

Though Lincoln County's premature death measure was lower than the state average, nearly 15 percent of people surveyed reported their health was fair or poor, a percentage higher than the state average. By comparison, about 10 percent of people in Marathon County reported being in fair or poor health. Marathon County ranked No. 12 overall and also had a lower rate of premature death.

Shelley Hersil, director of the Lincoln County Health Department, called the report a good snapshot of what is happening in the county.

In addition, researchers assessed health behaviors, socioeconomic status, physical environment and health care factors such as lack of health insurance, dental care and diabetes care. Those results were not factored into the rankings but were included to help counties and their residents understand how they compared to the rest of the state, said Dr. Patrick Remington, director of the Population Health Institute.

Lincoln County fared worse than Marathon, Wood and Portage counties in several health behaviors. Researchers noted Lincoln County's rates of smoking, smoking during pregnancy, physical inactivity and insufficient fruit and vegetable intake are higher than the state averages.

"We know smoking in pregnancy is a problem," Hersil said.

A coalition of public health officials, health care leaders and others began working in 2006 to develop plans to address that issue and other public health concerns such as obesity, smoking and poor diet and exercise habits, Hersil said.

Addressing issues in which a county ranked behind its peers could help improve residents' health over time, Remington said.