

How Healthy is Your County?

How healthy is your county? It's time to check out the 2019 County Health Rankings to find out! This nationwide rankings report describes the overall health of each county and ranks the healthiest county (#1) through the least healthy county in each state.

These county health rankings can help counties understand what factors are influencing the health of their residents. There is a ranking for health outcomes (based on length of life and quality of life) and a ranking for health factors (health behaviors, access to and quality of health care, various social and economic factors, and the physical environment).

Among South Heartland's four counties - Adams, Clay, Nuckolls and Webster - Nuckolls County ranks the best (21st out of 79 ranked counties) for health outcomes and ranks the best (33rd) for health factors. We can see why Nuckolls County ranked so well if we look at some of the components that contribute to the overall rankings. For example, Nuckolls County ranked 10th for quality of life (a health outcome) and 20th for physical environment (a health factor).

Social and economic factors, such as social isolation, high school graduation, and employment, can create conditions that either support or are barriers to individual health. It is worth noting that Nuckolls County scored high in social associations – much higher than the top performing counties in the U.S.!

If we dig a little deeper, we see that each of the four counties has strengths. Adams County ranked 15th in the state for clinical care quality and access, which considers the number of primary care physicians, dentists and mental health providers, as well as rates of breast cancer screening and flu vaccinations. Clay County ranked 20th for length of life (a health outcome) and had lower rates of children in poverty (a health factor) than the rest of the South Heartland counties. Webster County ranked 28th for physical environment (a health factor) which considers levels of air pollution and particulate matter, and had no alcohol-impaired driving deaths (a health factor) during the reporting period.

One take-home message from the county health rankings report is that where we live, learn, work, worship and play affects each of us and can determine our health and life expectancy. Each of the four rural South Heartland counties has challenges - factors that could be addressed to help the county be healthier. But how?

One role of a public health department is to help our communities identify health issues (for example, with the County Health Rankings report) and set health goals. The health department also helps communities plan how to take action with proven, science-based programs and interventions.

For example, the 2019 County Health Rankings report shows that, just like last year, Adult Obesity is one outcome that is a challenge in all four of our counties. We know that obesity is a risk factor for cardiovascular disease and diabetes, so SHDHD sets goals to help more people learn if they are at risk for developing these diseases and to that ensure proven programs, such as Smart Moves Diabetes

Prevention Program and the YMCA's Self-Monitored Blood Pressure Program, are available for people wanting to make lifestyle changes to prevent these diseases.

South Heartland is working to prevent obesity by improving access to and promoting healthy foods and beverages in grocery stores and vending machines, encouraging adoption of worksite wellness policies that support employees to be physically active at work, and facilitating community efforts to design walking routes and paths to make it easier to be physically active in the community.

The health department partners with many other organizations and government agencies to address health and safety improvement opportunities, together. In 'public health language' we say that one of our jobs is to be the 'chief health strategist' for our communities. Working together, we can build healthier communities. But we need your help to get there.

SHDHD works with governmental services, elected leaders, schools and colleges, hospitals, healthcare providers and behavioral health providers. We collaborate with faith-based, civic and human services organizations. We partner with businesses and worksites, non-profits, volunteers, and many others who contribute in large and small ways to the public's health.

And, because we work together, our communities have many local achievements to be proud of. We are collaborating on preparedness and response for natural disasters and public health emergencies, such as flooding or pandemic flu. We are initiating healthy school policies and action plans that lead to healthier young people. We are reducing exposure to environmental hazards, such as lead and radon. We are improving screening for chronic diseases and cancer.

We are also containing and preventing infectious diseases and we are helping people to receive vaccinations for preventable diseases. We are facilitating safer and healthier workplaces and providing services to support healthier moms and babies. We are helping individuals and families to access health care and behavioral health services, safe and affordable housing, and other basic services. And, we are empowering individuals in all walks of life to live healthy lifestyles.

Check out the County Health Rankings and consider how you or your organization can take action to help your county be healthier. Working together, with the right partners and policy makers, we can help our next generation be healthier than the one before.

For more information about your county's health ranking, visit: www.countyhealthrankings.org/.

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