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316-660-9370 WWW.SEDGWICKCOUNTY.ORG

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

March 20, 2013

CONTACT

Amanda Matthews
Kristi Zukovich

HEALTH RANKINGS HELP IDENTIFY AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT Sedgwick County's Health is Ranked Among 102 Kansas Counties

(Sedgwick County, Kansas) – The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and the University of Wisconsin Population Health Institute have compiled the “2013 County Health Rankings,” based on 29 measures of health that reflect the overall health of people in counties in every state across the country.

What do the rankings tell us?

The rankings, available at www.countyhealthrankings.org, include a snapshot of each county in Kansas with a color-coded map comparing each county's overall health ranking. The scores are divided into two categories: health factors and health outcomes. Researchers used five measures to assess the level of overall health, or health outcomes, for Kansas by county:

- Rate of people dying before age 75
- Percent of people who report being in fair or poor health
- Number of days people report being in poor physical and poor mental health
- Rate of low-birth-weight infants.

How did Sedgwick County rank?

Based on the health outcome measures, Sedgwick County ranked 72nd out of 102 ranked counties in Kansas, the same rank as in 2012.

Sedgwick County ranked 80th for health factors that affect people's health within four categories: health behavior (47th), clinical care (12th), social and economic factors (96th), and physical environment (52nd).

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Among the many health factors considered are:

- Tobacco Use
- Diet and Exercise
- Alcohol Use
- Sexual Activity
- Access to Care
- Quality of Care
- Education
- Employment
- Income
- Family and Social Support
- Community Safety
- Environmental Quality
- Built Environment

These rankings help to illustrate that health is complex and cannot be measured by any one factor. “These rankings highlight areas where we excel compared to other parts of the state, like the fact that we are a medical hub and have proportionately higher numbers of primary care physicians and dentists.” said Sedgwick County Health Department Director Claudia Blackburn. “They also illustrate social and economic factors where we rank poorly compared to other counties in Kansas.”

How does the health department use the rankings?

The Sedgwick County Health Department uses these data and others like it to better understand the contributing factors related to public health – even those that aren’t always considered – and engage residents and community leaders to take actions that support community health improvement.

One example of measures that aren’t always considered is that, according to these rankings, Sedgwick County has 411 fast food restaurants – more than any other county – which make up 54 percent of all restaurants in Sedgwick County. This is important because studies show that an increase in obesity and diabetes prevalence is linked to increased access to fast food outlets in a community. Obesity and diabetes are community identified priority health concerns in Sedgwick County.

Other examples not always at the forefront of public health conversations, but that certainly contribute to the health of a community include socio-economic factors, such as high school graduation rates, children in single parent households, and violent crime. While the health department isn’t in the business of targeting these factors directly, programs such as Healthy Babies not only address the low-birth-weight problem, but also teach mothers and fathers to be better parents, helping break existing cycles that contribute to socio-economic factors.

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Assessing the health of the community and influencing health behaviors are core functions of public health and two of the many important roles for the Sedgwick County Health Department. These data provide measures of health that illustrate opportunities for community initiatives to improve health. At the community level, the health department works with a number of coalitions, such as the Visioneering Health Alliance and the Health and Wellness Coalition to catalyze action around policies that will improve the health of the whole community.

These rankings serve as a reminder that individual choices about smoking, being physically active for at least 30 minutes a day, and eating healthful foods like fruits and vegetables are intentional choices that influence our health, but so too are environmental factors like access to healthful foods, clean air and safe neighborhoods. Each of us has the opportunity to improve our health choices, and we can influence those around us to make healthy choices.

Additional community health data can be found in the 2012 Sedgwick County Health Department Data Book, available at www.sedgwickcounty.org.

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