

Ozaukee, healthiest in state

County Health Rankings & Roadmaps

Building a Culture of Health, County by County

County's No. 1 for fourth year running

By Colleen Jurkiewicz
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OZAUKEE COUNTY — Residents of Ozaukee County won't be surprised to hear that, once again, their county has been named Wisconsin's healthiest by the annual County Health Rankings, produced by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation in collaboration with the University of Wisconsin Population Health Institute.

Amy Kozicki, health educator with the Ozaukee Public Health Department, said that none of her colleagues are surprised by the results. It is the fourth year in a row and the seventh time in eight years that Ozaukee County has topped the list.

"It was expected, and I think that just goes in correlation with the high socioeconomic status (of the county)," she said. "Also we did rank this year, again, with only 6 percent of the county residents having no health insurance, so that definitely plays a big factor as well."

The rankings depict data for health outcomes and health factors, both of which listed Ozaukee County at number one. Health outcomes are determined equally by length of life and quality of life, the latter being broken down into statistics that include, among other details, percentage of babies with low birthweight (just 6 percent of live births in Ozaukee), and poor or fair physical health days (2.8 per month, as self-reported by residents).

Health factors take into account various health behaviors like adult smoking (13 percent), clinical care, social and economic factors and physical environment.

Kozicki said that, as in recent years, there is room for Ozaukee County residents to improve their health habits. "Obesity is really big, it did go up 2 percent (to 27 percent) from last year, and it is still higher than the national average. Another big one that kind of jumped out at us is the excessive drinking, which did decrease 1 percent from last year (to 25 percent) but it's still right at that mark

with the whole entire state of Wisconsin and then a lot higher than the national average."

Kozicki characterized binge drinking and excessive drinking as "a statewide problem."

The rankings have an added interest to the Public Health Department this year because of its ongoing merger with the same entity in Washington County. Washington County was ranked seventh in both health outcomes and health factors, losing out to Ozaukee County in categories like length of life, teen birth rate (6 percent to Washington County's 13) and ratio of citizens to primary care physicians (710 to 1 in Ozaukee County, 1,620 to 1 in Washington County) but trumping it in areas like alcohol-impaired driving deaths (46 percent of all motor vehicle crashes for Ozaukee County, 37 for Washington County).

Kozicki said that the health department is hoping to improve Washington County's ranking next year. "We're just looking to see what's working in Ozaukee and then hopefully implement those same procedures or processes in Washington as well. But they've always been ranked in the top 10, which is great, and they're doing a lot of wonderful things, too."

Interestingly, the data shows that physical inactivity in Ozaukee County has been on the rise in recent years, even as access to exercise opportunities were ranked at 89 percent (a measure of how much of the populace lives reasonably close to parks or recreational facilities).

Kozicki said that, in addition to the socioeconomic advantage of Ozaukee County residents, health outcomes are boosted by the 95-percent high school graduation rate of its residents. "Education definitely has a big impact on your health."



NEWS GRAPHIC

Ozaukee County's Newspaper Since 1883

Volume 134, Number 23 ■ March 22, 2016

Periodical Postage Paid at Cedarburg, WI 53012 and additional mailing offices. ISSN 1056-9006.

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