

Delaware General Health District

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NEWS RELEASE

DELAWARE #1 IN OHIO IN FIRST-EVER COUNTY HEALTH RANKINGS

P.O. Box 570 1-3 W. Winter St. Delaware OH 43015
740-368-1700 FAX 740-368-1736 Web Site: www.delawarehealth.org

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

For further information contact Jesse Carter, public information officer, at 740-203-2085.

DELAWARE, Oh., Feb. 17, 2010 – Delaware County came out on top in Ohio in the first ever county-by-county health rankings issued today.

Delaware County topped all 88 Ohio counties in both health outcomes and health factors, the key summary measures in the report. Delaware County residents have the longest average lives in Ohio, one of two measures of health outcomes analyzed in the report.

Delaware County also topped Ohio in social and economic factors, which include education, employment, income, family and social support, and community safety. Delaware County ranked second best in Ohio in healthy behaviors, fourth in clinical care, fifth in morbidity (a measurement of relative sickness and quality of life), and 26th in physical environment factors affecting health.

The county-by-county health rankings were issued this morning by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and the University of Wisconsin Population Health Institute. The report can be viewed online at www.countyhealthrankings.org.

“We are all very pleased. We join our medical, mental health and social service partners in celebrating the overall health status of Delaware County residents,” said Health Commissioner Frances M. Veverka MPH R.S. of the Delaware General Health District.

“Most of the recognition is due to Delaware County residents themselves. They have shown time and again their interest and commitment to improving their health and the health of their families and communities. They have the highest average level of education in Ohio, which leads to success in life, and rank high in other socioeconomic factors. This relates to a healthy

community because people have both the knowledge and the means to enjoy healthy lifestyles,” Commissioner Veverka said.

Commissioner Veverka cautioned that despite the good ranking, there are many Delaware County residents who don’t enjoy good health or access to health care, healthy foods, or safe places for physical activity. Funding to help families in those unfortunate circumstances continues to shrink.

Delaware County also shares health challenges facing all of Ohio, including rising obesity rates that threaten to lower life expectancy.

The report based its health outcomes rankings equally on counties’ mortality (life length) and morbidity, a measure that includes self-reported health status, days of poor physical and mental health, and numbers of low birth weight infants. The rankings used data collected in various years between 2001 and 2008, with most rankings based on several years of data.

Thirteen categories were used to create the health factors rankings. The social and economic factors, in which Delaware County led Ohio, include education, employment, income, family and social support, and community safety. The health behaviors, in which Delaware County ranked second best in Ohio, include tobacco use, diet and exercise, alcohol use, and unsafe sex. The clinical care category considered access to care and quality of care; Delaware County was fourth best in that.

The physical environment category included U.S. EPA data for ozone and particulate air pollution, access to healthy foods, and prevalence of liquor stores. Commissioner Veverka noted that Delaware County doesn’t have much industrial air pollution, but there is traffic congestion and most residents must drive to get basic goods and services. Those factors increase pollution from vehicle exhaust. Commissioner Veverka also said local residents have expressed concerns about air quality in local health surveys, and that numerous people with asthma came to DGHD H1N1 flu immunization clinics in recent months.

While Delaware County led Ohio in the rankings, Ohio’s health ranking among states is below average at 33rd. That’s according to the 2009 edition of America’s Health Rankings issued by the United Health Foundation.

Delaware General Health District representatives plan a presentation on the County Health Rankings at the Delaware County Commissioners meeting Thursday at 9 a.m.

The Delaware General Health District has a considerable amount of health data collected during local health assessment projects. In many instances, this data is newer and/or more specific or complete than that in the County Health Rankings. We encourage interested parties to log on to www.delawarehealth.org for that local data.

We at the Delaware General Health District are continually assessing various aspects of our population's health and working with partners to address the most pressing health needs. These assessments always include community surveys, focus groups, and brainstorming sessions, so public input has been used to set our priorities.

Our latest Personal Health Assessment (2007-08) prioritized the top three community health issues as overweight/obese status of residents and their related eating and exercise habits; alcohol, substance abuse, and violence among county youth; and linkages and access to services. Visit http://www.delawarehealth.org/c_data.htm for a detailed report on the Delaware County community health data. We encourage you to get involved in maintaining our ranking status. Contact Lux Phatak at lphatak@delawarehealth.org or call her at (740) 203-2081.

On the Environmental Health side, we are preparing to issue our Annual Report which will include a public survey about local environmental concerns. We encourage everyone to respond to that survey and to consider getting involved with our PACE assessment committee. Get involved by contacting Susan Sutherland at ssutherland@delawarehealth.org or call her at (740) 203-2082.