

Media Contact:

Melissa Blair
Robert Wood Johnson Foundation
(609) 627-5937
media@rwjf.org

Kay Campbell or Toni Williams
Burness Communications
(301) 652-1558
kcampbell@burnesscommunications.com
twilliams@burnesscommunications.com

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County Health Rankings Show People Living in Least Healthy Counties Twice as Likely to Have Shorter Lives than People Living in Healthiest Counties *Least Healthy Counties Also Have Twice as Many Children Living in Poverty and Teen Births*

Princeton, N.J. and Madison, Wis.—The fifth edition of the *County Health Rankings* released today continues to show us that where we live matters to our health. Large gaps remain between the least healthy counties and healthiest counties. For instance, the least healthy counties have twice the death rates and twice as many children living in poverty and teen births as the nation's healthiest counties.

A collaboration between the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF) and the University of Wisconsin Population Health Institute (UWPHI), the *County Health Rankings* allow each state to see how its counties compare on 29 factors that impact health, including smoking, high school graduation rates, unemployment, physical inactivity, and access to healthy foods. The *Rankings* are available at www.countyhealthrankings.org.

“The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation’s vision for a culture of health is one where everyone has the opportunity to be healthy,” said Dr. Risa Lavizzo-Mourey, RWJF president and CEO. “The *County Health Rankings* are a starting point for change, helping communities come together, identify priorities, and create solutions that will help all in our diverse society live healthier lives, now and for generations to come.”

National Trends

The *Rankings* provide county-to-county comparisons within a state; this year’s *Rankings* also show important national trends:

- Teen birth rates have decreased about 25 percent since 2007.
- The rate of preventable hospital stays decreased about 20 percent from 2003 to 2011.
- Smoking rates dropped from 21 percent in 2005 to 18 percent in 2012.
- Completion of at least some college increased slightly from 59 percent in 2005 to 64 percent in 2012.

New Measures in 2014

This year's report features the following new measures:

- **Housing:** Almost 1 in 5 households are overcrowded, pose a severe cost burden, or lack adequate facilities to cook, clean, or bathe. These problems are greatest on the East and West coasts, Alaska, and parts of the South.
- **Transportation:** More than three-quarters of workers drive to work alone and among them 33 percent drive longer than a half hour each way. Driving contributes to physical inactivity, obesity, and air pollution.
- **Food Environment:** People in many parts of the country face food insecurity (or the threat of hunger) and limited access to healthy foods, especially in counties in the Southwest, across parts of the South, and the western U.S.
- **Mental Health:** Amid growing attention to mental health care, the availability of mental health providers in the healthiest counties in each state is 1.3 times higher than in the least healthy counties. The west and northeast regions of the country have the best access to mental health providers.
- **Injury Related Deaths:** The third leading cause of death in the U.S., injury death rates are 1.7 times higher in the least healthy counties than in the healthiest counties. These rates are particularly high in the Southwest, part of the Northwest (including Alaska), and the East South Central, and Appalachian regions.
- **Exercise Opportunities:** Access to parks or recreational facilities in the healthiest counties is 1.4 times higher than in the least healthy counties.

"The *County Health Rankings* show us how health is influenced by our everyday surroundings—where we live, learn, work, and play," said Bridget Catlin, PhD, MHSA, director of the *County Health Rankings*. "The *County Health Rankings* often provide the spark for businesses, community planners, policy-makers, public health, parents, and others to work together for better health."

The *County Health Rankings* is part of the *County Health Rankings & Roadmaps*. The program includes the *Roadmaps to Health* Action Center which provides local leaders with tools, step-by-step guides, and stories to help communities identify and implement solutions that make it easier for people to live

healthy lives. The program also includes the annual *RWJF Culture of Health Prize*, which celebrates communities who are harnessing the collective power of leaders, partners, and stakeholders to build a culture of health. This year's Prize winners and the call for 2014-2015 prize applications will be announced in June at the Aspen Ideas Festival, Spotlight: Health.

About the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation

For more than 40 years the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation has worked to improve the health and health care of all Americans. We are striving to build a national culture of health that will enable all Americans to live longer, healthier lives now and for generations to come. For more information, visit www.rwjf.org. Follow the Foundation on Twitter at www.rwjf.org/twitter or on Facebook at www.rwjf.org/facebook.

About the University of Wisconsin Population Health Institute

The [University of Wisconsin Population Health Institute](http://uwphi.pophealth.wisc.edu) is the focal point within the University of Wisconsin School of Medicine and Public Health to address questions of what it takes to improve health across the population. The Institute advances health and well-being for all by developing and promoting evidence-informed approaches to policy and practice at the local, state, and national levels. The Institute leads the work on the *County Health Rankings & Roadmaps* and manages the *RWJF Culture of Health Prize*. For more information, visit <http://uwphi.pophealth.wisc.edu>.