



March 8, 2010

Study finds Boone healthy

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Boone County residents are making strides to be healthy but more work needs to be done, according to a national report.

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A report released last month ranked Boone County No. 1 in health outcomes (mortality and morbidity) in Kentucky.

"I would say that the biggest thing that works toward that is the coordination we've had for five years as we have the Success By 6 early childhood development program (a United Way initiative). And it turns out that's been a benefit for all the citizens not just the younger population," said Boone County Commissioner Charlie Kenner who is also chairman of the Boone County Health Board.

Emily Gresham Wherle, a spokeswoman with the Northern Kentucky Independent District Health Department, said the county is fortunate to have a population that is well-educated and that impacts health. She said people with a higher level of education tend to be healthier.

Kenner said there is a lot of parental involvement in the county and Northern Kentucky.

"And you've got really good public and Catholic and Christian schools here. The home-schooling network here ... is done very well. It's just because they use the libraries and extension services (and) so forth," he said.

"County Health Rankings" compiled data for all 50 states. It's a project of the University of Wisconsin Population Health Institute and the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation.

Wherle cautioned the rankings can be used in different ways to make a case for different things.

"So just because Boone County did well doesn't mean that people should be complacent about their health," she said.

The county ranked third in the report's health factors category that considers health behaviors, clinical care, social and economic factors and physical environment.

Other findings in the report are that Boone County, compared to other Kentucky counties, is:

- * fourth in clinical care (uninsured adults, primary care provider rate, preventable hospital stays, diabetic screening and hospice use)
- * sixth in health behaviors (adult smoking, adult obesity, binge drinking, motor vehicle crash death rate, chlamydia rate and teen birth rate)
- * third in social economic factors (high school graduation, college degrees, unemployment, children in poverty, income inequality, inadequate social support, single-parent households and homicide rate).

The report ranked the county 101st in physical environment compared to the 119 other Kentucky counties. Factors in that category are air pollution-particulate matter days, air pollution-ozone days, access to healthy foods and liquor store density.

Wherle said factors such as air pollution days are because the county is a more urban and developed area, something not entirely in the control of Boone County residents. She said the county could improve by raising awareness of changing behaviors.

"We all see in the summer when the smog alerts are issued but do we really act any differently?" she said. For people with asthma or chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, a high smog day can create health problems, Wherle said.

The full report can be viewed at www.countyhealthrankings.org/kentucky/boone .
