



Dickinson-Iron District Health Department

Dickinson County

818 Pyle Drive, Kingsford, MI 49802
Ph: (906) 774-1868 Fax: (906) 774-9910
BRANCH OFFICE

www.didhd.org

Iron County

601 Washington Avenue, Iron River, MI 49935
Ph: (906) 265-9913 Fax: (906) 265-2950
MAIN OFFICE

News Release

Contact: Steve Markham, Director
Phone: 906-265-4192
Email: smarkham@hline.org

Immediate Release

County Health Rankings - 2012

Kingsford, Michigan – April 10, 2012. Dickinson and Iron placed in the top 50 percent of counties in Michigan, in a report that ranks counties according to health indicators. The report provides a snapshot of each of the nation's counties and ranks them against other counties within their state.

The report released this month addresses not only health care but other subjects such as health behaviors and the general well-being of a county's residents. The report was funded by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and was completed by the University of Wisconsin Population Health Institute.

"I think it is incredibly important to be able to look at the overall health of our community and the factors that influence it and one way we are able to do that is by conducting community health assessments," said Dr. Teresa Frankovich, Medical Director for the Dickinson-Iron District Health Department. "The report is a good effort and has provided us with some data to review."

Since 2010, the County Health Rankings report allows nearly all counties in the United States to compare themselves with other counties within their state on a variety of health indicators such as mortality (how long we live), morbidity (what is our health-related quality of life), tobacco use, obesity, access to healthcare and the physical environment. Other indicators that have an impact on our health such as unemployment, poverty, education and safety are also included.

-More-

Although the rankings allow for comparisons, Frankovich said the individual rankings are less important than looking at the specific data that was collected and whether it accurately reflects what we already know about our communities. “One problem when developing a report of this kind is that in order to measure all counties by the same standards, large national databases are used and it can be tricky using this information to evaluate small, rural populations”, said Frankovich.

She also notes that some of the measurements chosen to review appear to have been chosen because they are easily found for counties across the nation, not necessarily because they are the best measures of a particular problem. For example, the study measures morbidity (how sick a person or community is), according to how people responded to a telephone survey when asked whether they were healthy or not and how many days in the last 30 they felt unwell—either physically or mentally. “Perhaps we would get better information by looking at how many people in our community have been diagnosed with diabetes, heart disease, cancer or other chronic diseases...but that information is harder to get to in a standardized way, across the country,” according to Frankovich

“That being said, it will be helpful to look at the data to see what it tells us about each community’s strengths and challenges”, Frankovich said.

This report suggests that Dickinson County's strengths lie in areas such as availability and quality of clinical care with low numbers of uninsured individuals, good ratio of doctors to population, good diabetic screening rates and fewer preventable hospital stays. Challenges were seen in areas such as smoking, obesity and excessive alcohol use.

Iron County ranked well in areas such as air quality, perceived adequate social support, diabetic screening and number of sexually transmitted infections. Challenges were seen in areas such as obesity and physical inactivity, number of uninsured, children in poverty and motor vehicle crash rates. Reliable data were not available in this report on smoking and alcohol use rates for Iron County, so comparisons could not be made.

The annual Kids Count Report was also released recently and points to other areas of concern for our counties such as increasing numbers of confirmed child abuse and neglect cases, increasing numbers of children living in poverty (16% Dickinson, 24% Iron), and while scores are on an upward trend, over 40% of 11th graders in both counties were “not proficient” in math on standardized testing. Issues such as these...child safety, poverty, and education also impact health...sometimes for generations.

-More-

Frankovich said while local health officials already know that health risk factors like smoking and obesity are significant concerns locally, as in much of the country, having it pointed out in the study serves as a reminder. These risk factors, among others, have a direct link to chronic diseases such as diabetes, heart disease and cancer. Frankovich said one of the purposes of the rankings is to draw people's attention and motivate them to change.

"The report's authors hope that seeing the counties in ranking will mobilize communities to make changes," she said. Another key point, said Frankovich, is that unhealthy behaviors such as smoking, poor eating and lack of physical activity, are modifiable - even more reason to make people aware of the problem.

"Not only can individuals change their own behavior they can also help to change the community they live in by supporting things like the development of great places to be active (like safe bike lanes, parks and trails) and increasing access to good, fresh foods, through farmer's markets and community gardens."

While the results of the report shouldn't be taken at face value, some of the information can be useful when looked at in the context of what else is known about the health of the county. "I'm reviewing the results and looking for information that's helpful, relevant and appears reliable for measuring health issues in our county," she said. As we look at assessing the health of our community, this is one more tool we can use."

###