



Sarasota County Health Department | Florida Department of Health
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April 3, 2012

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MEDIA NOTE: A statewide webinar, hosted by Florida Public Health Institute Executive Director Dr. Claude Earl Fox, will take place at 11 a.m. Reserve your webinar seat at <https://www3.gotomeeting.com/register/329252414>. Lines are limited to the first 100 callers. For specific questions regarding Florida counties' rankings, contact Martha Harbin: mharbin@policywisdom.com or 850-251-2803.

2012 report released on Sarasota County health ranking

The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and the University of Wisconsin released the "2012 County Health Rankings." This is the third in a series of annual reports that ranks counties nationwide on health outcomes and health behaviors. This year's report is available for viewing on www.countyhealthrankings.org.

The report shows how Sarasota County ranks on factors that influence its overall health ranking.

"We were pleased that Sarasota County's health ranking improved overall. During the two previous years, the health outcome overall ranking was fourth. This year's overall third-place ranking among Florida's 67 counties affirms that Sarasota County is a great place to work, live, and raise our families," said Sarasota County Health Department Administrator Chuck Henry.

"Our high ranking reflects the priority that our community has placed on healthy environments and healthy lifestyles," he added. "Placing emphasis on the quality of its parks and recreation facilities, and in helping ensure that everyone has access to quality health care, including preventive screenings for diabetes and breast cancer, helps to improve the health of our community."

Health officials say that even though we ranked among the best in the state for some factors, there is still more work to do. They cited mental health as an example. How people handle stress and changes in their lives can be linked to excessive drinking, increased risk for motor vehicle crashes and suicides.

"We know that these issues do not stop at the county line so local hospital and health department CEOs collaborate on a number of health initiatives across the region," said Community Health Improvement Partnership (CHIP) director Kari Ellingstad. "One effort is 'Safe Rx,' which facilitated the establishment of safe disposal sites for unused prescription medications and education for pharmacists and health care providers in a four-county area."

According to Sarasota County Behavioral Health Coordinator Brooke Baker, Sarasota County was the first community in the state to establish a county ordinance that is effectively addressing recordkeeping, staffing and training issues relating to pain management clinics, while also promoting the use of The Electronic-Florida Online Reporting of Controlled Substances Evaluation program (E-FORCSE), which is Florida's Prescription Drug Monitoring Program (PDMP). Sarasota County is now assisting other counties in similar efforts.

“Another effort is the North Port Drug-Free Youth (D-Fy) program,” said Ellingstad. “This model project has more than 1,000 youths who have taken a pledge to remain drug free with support from the local community.”

“The County Health Rankings reinforce how important it is to sustain programs that demonstrate good outcomes if we want to stay healthy as a community,” said Chuck Henry.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), tobacco use and obesity are the leading causes of preventive disease and death in the U.S.

The Sarasota County Health Department's Tobacco Prevention Program focuses on fostering behavior change through policy initiatives such as restricting candy-flavored tobacco sales in retail establishments, creating breathe easy zones at college campuses and tobacco-free campuses across Sarasota County, as well as assisting property managers in eliminating tobacco use in apartment communities.

County-wide efforts to address obesity include involvement in the federal Healthy Weight Collaborative. A group led by the Community Health Improvement Partnership was selected as just one of ten teams across the nation to participate in phase one of this initiative, which focuses on working across sectors to expand obesity prevention and treatment efforts.

“Limited access to healthy foods” and “fast food restaurants” were added as measures of the health of our physical environment in this year's County Health Rankings. These measures take into consideration the variance in the distribution of farmers markets and supermarkets in urban versus rural area and are a proxy measure for nutritional status and risk for obesity, high blood pressure, stroke and diabetes.

The Newtown Community Health Action Team (CHAT), a group of residents working on a grass-roots level to promote a healthier community, are currently developing an action plan designed to identify more resources for fresh foods and to create partnerships with local food retailers. This initiative came as a result of a healthy food audit of food retailers in the Newtown/North Sarasota area conducted by the CHAT with support from students from State College of Florida. Their vision is to increase access to healthy foods, including helping stores market healthy food options and drawing from the experiences of cities like New Orleans, Louisiana, and Brooklyn, New York, by securing subsidies for “Healthy Store Makeovers.

Other measures in the physical environment category include air quality and access to recreational facilities. Even with the new measures, Sarasota County has consistently improved in the physical environment category since the first rankings were released in 2010. This year, Sarasota ranked ninth in Florida compared to 18th last year and 56th in 2010.

In this year's County Health Rankings, the percent of uninsured individuals improved from 27% in 2011 and 26% in 2010 to 24% in this year's report. The Sarasota County Health Department, Senior Friendship Center and Sarasota Memorial Health Care System have worked together for several years to help ensure that residents who lack health insurance can access the appropriate safety net provider for the most quality, cost-effective care possible. During the past year, the effort was taken to a new level with support from The Patterson Foundation to help create a plan for a sustainable continuum of care for families who would otherwise not get the health care they need due to concerns about cost and affordability.

"The County Health Rankings provide our community with tools and guidance on ways we can take action to further improve health," added Henry. "With the knowledge, we as a community can take steps to continue to work toward creating a healthier Sarasota County."

"Health is everyone's business. Working together, we can make Sarasota County a healthier place to live, learn, work and play," said Sarasota County Administrator Randall Reid.

For more information about the local health rankings, call 941-861-2852.

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