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COUNTY HEALTH RANKINGS SHOW WHERE WE LIVE, WORK, LEARN AND PLAY MATTERS TO OUR HEALTH *Washtenaw County Ranks High among Michigan Counties*

YPSILANTI, Mich., March 31, 2011 – The newly released 2011 *County Health Rankings* confirm the critical role that factors such as education, jobs, income, environment and access to health care play in how healthy people are and how long they live. The *Rankings* put Washtenaw County first in health factors among Michigan counties for the second year in a row. Washtenaw ranks fourth among Michigan counties in health outcomes. Washtenaw County’s high rankings are the result of multiple factors known to impact health – including our health behaviors, social and economic circumstances and the physical environment in which we live.

“As a community, we can be tremendously proud of these results,” says Richard Fleece, Health Officer for Washtenaw County Public Health. “At the same time, we know there are areas within our community where it’s much harder to live a healthy life. We have to keep looking at the multiple factors that contribute to good health – and ensure that our community maintains and supports them,” he continued.

The health factors examined in the *County Health Rankings* go well beyond medical care and include our health behaviors, social and economic conditions and the physical environment in which we live. The health outcomes measured include how long people live (mortality) and to what degree they report feeling healthy (morbidity). *Rankings* are published online at www.countyhealthrankings.com by the University of Wisconsin Population Health Institute and the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. They let people to see how their county compares with others in their state and against national benchmarks. It is the only tool of its kind that measures the overall health of counties in all 50 states.

Importantly, the *County Health Rankings* emphasize what happens to our health outside the doctor's office. For example, people who live in communities with smoke-free laws are less likely to smoke, which reduces diseases caused by tobacco. People who live in areas with lots of walking paths are more likely to be physically active. And, people with access to grocery stores and local farmers' markets are more likely to eat healthier, nutritious foods.

In Washtenaw County, the "Clean Indoor Air Regulation" has been in place since 2003 and has contributed to lower overall smoking rates prior to the ban on smoking in bars and restaurants that went into effect statewide last year. Washtenaw County has the lowest adult smoking rate in the state at 13%. In contrast, 22% of all Michigan adults report smoking according to the *Rankings*. Programs that support healthier food choices in low-income areas, promote safe walking and biking routes to schools and create policy and environmental changes that improve health are also underway.

While the *Rankings* allow health comparisons at the county level, they do not show the significant variations in health that exist within a county. There are geographic areas and populations within Washtenaw County that do not enjoy the same level of health as others:

- Diabetes – Among all Washtenaw County residents, 9% have been diagnosed with diabetes. This percentage increases to 38% among unemployed persons and 26% among persons with less than high school education.
- In Washtenaw County, black infants are three times more likely to die than white infants before their first birthday.
- The average age of death in Sylvan, York and Ypsilanti Townships starts at 64 years. In contrast, it is over 76 years in Bridgewater Township, Saline and Ann Arbor.

This type of "within-county" data is available from the Health Improvement Plan (HIP), which includes a 2000 household survey conducted every five years since 1995. For nearly 20 years, HIP data has identified local health challenges and opportunities. It has focused resources, partnerships and health improvement strategies where they can be most effective. More is available at <http://hip.ewashtenaw.org>, and the 2010 results are anticipated in June 2011.

Washtenaw County Public Health promotes health and works to prevent disease or injury in our community. Visit us online at <http://publichealth.ewashtenaw.org>.

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