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Report: U.C. in state top 20 for overall health

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The Tennessee County Health Rankings Index for 2007, an annual report from the Tennessee Institute of Public Health, places Unicoi County among the top 20 counties in the state in overall health.

The annual assessment of population health in all 95 Tennessee counties ranked Unicoi County at 19th in overall health and 16th in health outcomes calculated by mortality rates, birth weights and self-reported general health.

Johnson County came in near the bottom of the rankings 85th out of 95 counties in both overall health and health outcomes. Washington County was ranked 36th in overall health and 48th in health outcomes while Carter County ranked 53rd in overall health and 47th in health outcomes.

Released last week, the annual rankings are based on 35 statistical measurements of health and health determinants such as education levels, employment rates, pollution and other socioeconomic and environmental factors that influence health. Data used to calculate the rankings were gathered from the state departments of Health, Education, Environment and Conservation, the Tennessee Bureau of Investigation, the Tennessee Commission on Children and Youth, the U.S. Census Bureau, Environmental Protection Agency, the Educational Needs Index and the Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System. In the area of health determinants, including access to health care, health behaviors, socioeconomic factors and physical environment, Washington County ranked 15th out of 95 counties.

Unicoi County was ranked 42nd in health determinants while Carter County was ranked 57th and Johnson County 83rd.

Sullivan County ranked 43rd in overall health, 53rd in health outcomes and 26th in health determinants.

According to the TIPH, the rankings provide a yearly snapshot of the overall health of county populations for use by policymakers and health care professionals working to identify problems and implement change.

The report cited Unicoi Countys low incidences of childhood lead poisoning and low birth weight and its 94 percent high school graduation rate as strengths contributing to the countys high overall health ranking.

Health challenges in Unicoi County cited by the report include the large number of homes and other residential properties built before 1950 when less stringent building codes allowed wider use of hazardous building materials. High nitrate levels in drinking water and physical inactivity also were among the health challenges cited in Unicoi County.

Washington Countys health strengths included the number of doctors and dentists per capita and low teen birth rates. Health challenges in Washington County include a high number of children with lead poisoning, air quality cancer risk, air quality hazard risk and physical inactivity.

Health strengths in Carter County include a low rate of sexually transmitted diseases, low mortality rates and the large percentage of the population that receives pneumonia vaccines. Health challenges in Carter County included a high percentage of homes built before 1950, low physical inactivity and high air quality hazard risk.

Health strengths in Johnson County include a low rate of violent crime and a low number of children with lead poisoning. Health challenges in Johnson County include education levels, the number of children living below the federal poverty level and physical inactivity.

The complete report, including a breakdown of health determinants for each county, can be viewed online at www.tn.gov/tniph.