

## HEALTH SURVEY

# Santa Cruz County ranks 11th

Health  
Marin County  
keeps top spot  
in state study

By Donna Jones

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WATSONVILLE — Santa Cruz County is healthier than most in the state.

That's according to an annual ranking of 57 California counties.

Santa Cruz came in 11th in health outcomes, climbing two places from 2013.

Marin County retained its top spot in the 5-year-old study by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and the University of Wisconsin Population Health Institute.

Neighboring Santa Clara and San Benito were both in the top 10. Monterey ranked 23rd.

The rankings are based on data from a broad swath of categories, from health behaviors and access to care to socioeconomic factors and violent crime.

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Workers at the Green Hills Road office complex in Scotts Valley, including five from Central California Alliance for Health, play a noon pick-up basketball game in the facility's recreation center. The Alliance is among the employers in health-conscious Santa Cruz County that incentivize healthy living for employees.

"It reminds us that health doesn't just happen in a doctor's office, a physician's office," said Dr. Lisa Hernandez, county health officer. "It also happens throughout the community."

Hernandez, presenting the report to representatives from social service, education and public safety agencies at a meeting of the Children's Network at the Watsonville Main Library, said the report also gives the county a chance to how it stacks up against others and where there's room for improvement.

She said while the county moved up in the rankings after dropping from seventh in 2011 to 13th in 2013, the factors affecting the grade are fairly static. Other counties are moving up because they are making improvements.

"The levels of smoking, obesity and drinking rates could be better (here)," Hernandez said.

Overall, the county ranked sixth in health behaviors with fewer adults smoking and more people involved in physical activity than state averages. But though obesity rates are below the state average of 24 percent, they're creeping up, from 18 percent of the population in 2010 to 20 percent today.

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Mastrianna at Dominican Hospital Wednesday. Being born in Santa Cruz County, one is likely to lead a healthy life. Excessive drinking — defined as consuming more than four to five alcoholic beverages on a single occasion or one or two every day, depending on gender — is on the rise at 21 percent, compared to 18 percent four years ago, and a 2014 state average of 17 percent.

"I was hoping to do better on that," Hernandez said.

While adult smoking is stable at 10 percent, the rankings don't measure tobacco use among youth, Hernandez said. And they don't take into account emerging challenges, such as e-cigarettes. Some of the marketing makes the devices "look like candy," she said.

Problems decades in the making take time to solve, said Mary Lou Goeke, executive director of United Way of Santa Cruz County.

Obesity, for example, "has to do with a lifetime of eating and exercise habits," she said.

Goeke said a focus on early intervention, such as

improving breast-feeding rates and getting healthier foods into day care centers and corner markets, will make a difference in the long run.

"Wind it forward five years and you're going to see improvement," she said.

County Supervisor John Leopold noted officials in Watsonville and Santa Cruz are dealing with past urban planning decisions that left both cities with an overabundance of alcohol vendors. Today's leaders are more aware of the impact on the community, and are working on the issue, he said.

"Change will be more incremental than monumental," he said.

Social factors, such as

childhood poverty, unemployment, education and single-parent households, also were considered in the rankings. Overall, the county ranked 16th in the category.

Though ranking better than the state average in most of factors, rates of violent crime and fatal injuries are higher.

The rankings show the county as a whole, Goeke said. Community leaders, looking to design interventions, need to take a closer look at gaps between different demographic groups.

"Jobs, education, income are the real drivers of health factors," Goeke said. "How are we different than Marin County? Jobs that pay very, very well, jobs in all sectors."

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