

# Health Ranking Dips

COUNTY DROPS FROM SEVENTH TO 10TH HEALTHIEST IN STATE



SHMUEL THALER/SENTINEL

Art Dover, left, rides his bicycle in Watsonville on Tuesday, exemplifying a healthy lifestyle in stark contrast to the fast-food restaurants on Freedom Boulevard.

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SANTA CRUZ — Santa Cruz County slipped a bit this year, ranking as the 10th healthiest county in California after being seventh last year.

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The rankings, issued Tuesday, are based on county data collected nationally and analyzed by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and the University of Wisconsin Population Health Institute.

For the third straight year, the healthiest county in the state was Marin.

That county has seen “premature deaths,” those before age 75, decline for a decade from more than 4,500 to 3,800; the numbers in Santa Cruz County have been stuck at 5,300.

Santa Cruz County improved in clinical care, with

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Dominican Hospital's Wellness Clinic mobile van sees patients from the parking lot of Our Lady Star of the Sea Church on Tuesday. The van is on the road five days a week.

## COUNTY HEALTH RANKINGS

	2011	2012	NATIONAL
<b>HEALTH OUTCOMES RANKING</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>10</b>	
Death before age 75	5,252	5,293	5,466
In poor health	16%	17%	10%
Poor physical health days	2.9	3.1	2.6
Poor mental health days	3.8	3.7	2.3
Low birthweight babies	5.5%	5.7%	6%
<b>HEALTH BEHAVIORS RANKING</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>3</b>	
Smoking	11%	10%	14%
Adult obesity	17%	20%	25%
Physical inactivity	NA	12%	21%
Excessive drinking	19%	18%	8%
Motor vehicle crash death rate	11%	11%	12%
Sexually transmitted infections	266	255	84
Teen birth rate	31	31	22
<b>CLINICAL CARE RANKING</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>13</b>	
Uninsured adults	23%	18%	11%
Primary care providers	644:1	644:1	631:1
Preventable hospital stays	52	44	49
Diabetic screening	74%	82%	89%
Mammography screening	67%	68%	74%
<b>SOCIAL &amp; ECONOMIC FACTORS RANKING</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>23</b>	
High school graduation	80%	77%	NA
Some college	66%	64%	68%
Unemployment	11.2%	12.7%	5.4%
Children in poverty	17%	19%	13%
Inadequate social support	21%	22%	14%
Single parent households	27%	28%	20%
Violent crime rate	473	494	73
<b>PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT RANKING</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>10</b>	
Air pollution, particulate matter days	0	0	0
Air pollution, ozone days	0	0	0
Access to recreational facilities	15	16	16
Limited access to healthy food	NA	7%	0%
Fast food restaurants	NA	41%	25%

SOURCE: www.countyhealthrankings.org



SHMUEL THALER/SENTINEL

Sisters Miriam Braverman, left, and Zonia Gonzalez walk in Scotts Valley on Tuesday. Gonzalez walks five miles a day as part of an incentive program by her employer, Central California Alliance for Health.

## HEALTH

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more adults having health insurance and more diabetic screenings, according to 2009 data.

But the county slipped in health behaviors, with excessive drinking, teen births and sexually transmitted infections remaining higher than the national average. In addition, the county was downgraded for social and economic factors, for higher unemployment in 2010 and a higher crime rate, based on FBI statistics for 2007-2009, and downgraded for physical environment, with 41 percent of restaurants offering fast food, according to 2009 census data.

The counties with the lowest rate of fast-food restaurants: Mono, Amador and Plumas, at 29 percent.

"The rankings are a starting point for conversation and collaboration," said Patrick Remington of the University of Wisconsin School for Medicine and Public Health during a teleconference on the report.

Asked why the rankings use data from 2010 or before, he said, "We are reliant on national (data) sources."

Michelle Larkin of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation pointed out how different aspects of the community play a role in health.

"If you're diabetic and you're told to buy healthy food and you don't have a place to buy that food, and you don't feel physically safe to exercise, it's hard to be compliant," she said. "That may impact the preventable (hospital) readmissions."

Laurie Mireles, policy and outreach director for the Health Improvement Partnership of Santa Cruz Coun-

ty, said she was pleased to see improvement in clinical care, from 19th of 56 counties in 2010 to 13th in 2012.

The rankings methodology gives the most weight, 40 percent, to social and economic factors such as crime and unemployment, with health behaviors, 30 percent, and the physical environment, 10 percent.

"People focus on clinical, but that's only 20 percent of what makes us healthy," said Mary Lou Goeke of the United Way of Santa Cruz County, which oversees the annual community assessment project. "Our own behavior accounts to a third of the health outcomes. ... There's a lot we can do."

She cited as examples a 2010 Watsonville ordinance requiring new restaurants to offer healthy menu items, increases in breast-feeding, which reduces the risk of childhood obesity, and getting bike lanes and making it safe to walk to school.

Dominican Hospital in Santa Cruz put a new mobile van on the road last fall, visiting five county locations weekly to provide easier access to care.

"A bright spot for us is diabetic screening," said Giang Nguyen, director of the Santa Cruz County Health Services Agency.

She observed the margin of error was high for certain measures and noted some data are not the most recent.

"This is not data reflecting last year," she said, noting the county's new low-income health program enrolled 1,200 people this year, providing them access to doctors affiliated with the Central California Alliance for Health in Scotts Valley.

"Still, we need to work on this," she said. "We are going to kick off strategic planning for the health department, working with community

partners."

The crime rate in the city of Santa Cruz dropped last year, but the FBI database has yet to post data for all of 2011, noted Zach Friend, spokesman for the Santa Cruz Police Department.

FBI statistics for 2010 show violent crime reported by the Sheriff's Office increasing rather than decreasing.

Martha Quintana, nurse educator at the Diabetes Health Center in Watsonville, noted Watsonville has lower-paying jobs and more people without insurance.

"I think that is part of the barrier for better outcomes," she said. "A long time ago somebody called Freedom Boulevard the fast-food row. But now it is all over Watsonville."

On the positive side, she cited efforts by the United Way Go for Health group working to increase physical activity and access to healthy foods and the work of Jovenes Sanos, a teen group that lobbied for Watsonville's healthy menu ordinance.

Follow Sentinel reporter Jondi Gumz on Twitter @jondigumz.