

What is Health?

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The World Health Organization defines health as “a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity.”

What makes people healthy or unhealthy?



According to the Department of Health and Human Services, health is determined by a combination of factors including:

- **Biology and genetics** — Approximately 30 percent of the factors that make us ill or cause death come from our genetics. Genetics are not easily altered, so efforts to improve our health must focus on the other factors which impact health.
- **Individual behavior** — Individual behaviors are estimated to contribute to 40 percent of the factors that determine whether we will be healthy. What and how much we eat and drink, how physical active we are, whether or not we smoke or use other types of drugs, and how we deal with stress, are all decisions we make individually that affect our health — and sometimes the health of others around us.
- **Health services** — Access to quality health care (or lack of it) is estimated to contribute to 10 percent of our health outcomes. The ability to access regular and preventive care versus relying on the emergency room care is an important factor.
- **Social and environmental factors** — Social and environmental factors, such as access to education, job opportunities and living wages; or exposure to discrimination, crime, violence and a poor living environment, contribute to about 25 percent of the factors that determine health.
- **Policymaking** — Policies have the potential of positively or negatively affecting all of the other factors that determine health. It is important to always consider how policies may be affecting our pursuit of health and healthy communities.



How are we doing?

One way of determining how we are doing is by looking at the leading causes of death. In each of the nine counties in the Greater Kansas City area, most of the leading causes of death are at least partly due to lifestyle or behavioral factors — which means they are preventable. These leading causes include:

- Heart Disease.
- Cancer.
- Injuries and Poisonings.
- Stroke/Other Cerebrovascular Disease.
- Chronic Lower Respiratory Disease (which includes bronchitis, emphysema and asthma).
- Diabetes.



Another way of looking at how we are doing is to look at the number of people who are dying prematurely. Premature death is defined as the number of years of potential life lost before the age of 75. Of the Missouri counties, Platte County has the least number of premature deaths (4th out of 115 Missouri counties) followed by Clay (12th), Cass (20th), Jackson (73rd) and Ray (79th). Of the Kansas counties, Johnson County has the least premature deaths in the whole state (1 out of 98 reporting counties), followed by Leavenworth (21st), Miami (24th) and Wyandotte (89th).

An additional way of measuring how we are doing is to look at health behaviors, like smoking or physical inactivity, or health status, like obesity. These indicators are all linked to poor health outcomes. According to the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, here's how the counties in our area stack up:

| County | % Adults who smoke | % Adults who are obese | % of Adults reporting they are physically inactive | % of population with adequate access to locations for physical activity |
|--------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Cass | 23 | 33 | 30 | 64 |
| Clay | 21 | 28 | 26 | 82 |
| Jackson, Mo. | 22 | 32 | 25 | 91 |
| Platte | 16 | 29 | 27 | 78 |
| Ray | 27 | 31 | 35 | 27 |
| Johnson, Kan. | 13 | 23 | 18 | 94 |
| Leavenworth | 18 | 32 | 26 | 53 |
| Miami | 15 | 31 | 26 | 41 |
| Wyandotte | 25 | 39 | 33 | 87 |
| | At or above state average (Kan. 18%; Mo. 23%) | At or above state average (Kan. 30%; Mo. 31%) | At or above state average (Kan. 25%; Mo. 27%) | At or below state average (Kan. 71%; Mo. 70%) |
| Comparison: Healthiest Communities in U.S. | 14% | 25% | 21% | 85% |