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## **Douglas County drops in health rankings despite improvements**

**(Lawrence, KS)** – Douglas County is the ninth healthiest county in Kansas, according to the fourth annual County Health Rankings report, dropping two spots from last year.

The report, released Wednesday by the University of Wisconsin Population Health Institute and the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, ranks nearly every county in all 50 states using nationally available data to estimate how healthy people are and how long they live. The report, designed to promote local conversations about health, looks at health outcomes and health factors.

While Douglas County's overall ranking dropped, its outcomes for morbidity (self-reported quality of life and low birth weight babies) and mortality (years of potential life lost before age 75) both improved by one ranking from 2012. Douglas County ranks No. 33 for morbidity and No. 4 for mortality.

"The report continues to show us that where we live matters to our health," said Dan Partridge, director of the Lawrence-Douglas County Health Department. "There is a lot that we can do as individuals, but having the right policies and infrastructures in place can make a significant impact in improving our health."

Also ranked are the factors — behavior, clinical care, physical environment and social and economic status — that influence these outcomes. In this set of measures, Douglas County's ranking improved from No. 13 last year to No. 7.

Some specific areas that showed improvement included access to healthy foods and preventable hospital stays. While no one factor accounts for the improvements, Partridge said there has been a concerted effort to address these issues. Schools and workplaces are increasingly promoting gardens and other strategies to promote purchases of local foods, and they are adopting policies to ensure healthier meal and vending options. Lawrence Memorial Hospital has dedicated resources and is working with community partners to decrease the number of preventable readmissions to the hospital.

Access to healthy foods is just one of several measures that falls under the physical environment category, where Douglas County's ranking was No. 23, up from No. 98 last year. The increase is largely due to a new measure — drinking

water safety — and changes in how air pollution is reported. Douglas County fared well in both of these measures. The score also includes access to recreational facilities and fast food restaurants, both of which slightly improved from a year earlier.

Partridge said an area of concern is health behaviors where the county's ranking dropped from No. 6 to No. 8. These measures include smoking, diet, exercise, alcohol use and sexual activity. "While many residents think of Lawrence as a healthy community, we have room for improvement," Partridge said. "We don't just want to be champions in basketball, but champions in health. Our rivals in Manhattan have been faring better than us and we shouldn't just accept that."

The state's five healthiest counties are: Johnson, Riley, Stevens, Pottawatomie and Ellis. The least healthy are: Elk, Chautauqua, Wyandotte, Cherokee and Logan.

For more information and to see how other Kansas counties rank, view the full report, "County Health Rankings: Mobilizing Action Toward Community Health," at [ldchealth.org](http://ldchealth.org).