

Premature deaths down in 60 percent of US counties

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D.C. leads with a drop of almost one-third, reports County Health Rankings.

(HealthDay)—Premature death rates have fallen in 60 percent of the counties in the United States in the past decade, a new report shows.

In the District of Columbia, the premature death rate fell nearly one-third between 2004-06 and 2010-12, which was the largest drop among counties with 65,000 or more people, according to the 2015 County Health Rankings.

The rankings compared counties on 30 factors that affect health, including diet, exercise, housing, [violent crime](#), education and transportation. The rankings are a collaboration between the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and the University of Wisconsin Population Health Institute.

"The County Health Rankings have helped galvanize communities across

the nation to improve health," said Dr. Risa Lavizzo-Mourey in a news release from the group. She is president and CEO of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation.

However, in many counties, progress is not being made in reducing premature deaths. This year's rankings also revealed that nearly one in four children in the United States lives in poverty. Child poverty rates are more than twice as high in the least healthy counties than in the healthiest counties.

The least healthy counties also have more smokers, more teen births and more preventable hospital stays. They also have more alcohol-related car crashes, lower college attendance and poorer access to parks and gyms, the rankings noted.

Unemployment rates are 1.5 times higher in the least healthy counties than in the healthiest counties in each state, according to the rankings. Counties in the West, Southeast and Rust Belt (areas of the Midwest, around the Great Lakes and Northeast where factories are old and closed) regions of the United States had the highest unemployment levels during the recession. But many of those areas have seen improvement in their unemployment levels since 2010.

Violent crime rates—which impact health, well-being and stress levels—are highest in the Southwest, Southeast and Mississippi Delta regions, according to the [rankings](#).

More information: Here's where you can find the [2015 County Health Rankings](#).

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