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Cowlitz County Health rankings fair slightly better than last year

In the second year of the Robert Wood Johnson and University of Wisconsin Population Health Institute's *County Health Rankings*, Cowlitz County remains one of the counties with the poorest health. Cowlitz County ranked 32nd out of 39 counties for health outcomes and 33rd for health factors. The County Health Rankings rank the overall health of counties in the 50 states using the same type of data to measure each county.

The report drives home the message that where a person lives affects his or her health. Although Cowlitz County ranks low again, slight improvement was made in both categories. Last year, the first year of the report, Cowlitz County's health outcomes rank was 34 and the health factors rank was 36. There are areas of concern, however. In terms of health behaviors, now Cowlitz County ranks last, falling below Grays Harbor. At 36%, our rate of obesity is twice that of San Juan County (Rank 1) and at 52 per 1,000 females 15-19 years old, our teen birth rate is almost four times higher.

"The report emphasizes that where you live, work and play matters to your health. We rank last in Washington State in health behaviors. By working to create a community in which people choose to, and have the means to, make healthy lifestyle decisions, our hope is to see healthier, happier adults and children," stated Monica Monteon, Epidemiologist for the Cowlitz County Health department.

The report is based upon the idea that the health of residents can improve through programs and policies which affect factors that determine our health. An improvement in health outcomes can be made within communities by addressing what influences health, which are referred to as health factors and includes: healthy behaviors, medical care, social and economic factors, and the physical environment. Not all health factors are given equal importance in the overall rank. Social and economic factors have the greatest pull (40%), followed by health behaviors (30%), clinical care (20%) and the physical environment (10%).

"Our rankings are influenced by other counties rate's as well as our own. While we may not have improved in any measures that make up a ranking category, we can have a better rank if other counties' rates actually worsened," added Monica Monteon.

A summary table of the rankings is shown below.

Table I. Cowlitz County rank out of the 39 Washington State counties.

<i>Measure</i>	<i>2010 Report</i>	<i>2011 Report</i>
Health Outcomes (Overall)	34	32
Mortality	32	33
Morbidity	33	31
Health Factors (Overall)	36	33
Social and Economic Factors (Education, employment, income, family and social support, community safety)	37	32
Health Behaviors (Tobacco, diet and exercise, alcohol use, high risk sexual behavior)	38	39
Clinical Care (Access to care, quality of care)	2	9
Physical and Environment (Air quality, built environment)	16	25

More information can be located at www.countyhealthrankings.org

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