



Metro Denver

HEALTH & WELLNESS COMMISSION

Creating America's Healthiest Community

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Report: Metro Denver residents rank healthiest among 25 U.S. cities

Increasing obesity rates spark need for healthy eating and active living initiatives

DENVER – The Metro Denver Health & Wellness Commission (MDHWC) today released *Metro Denver 2007: A Report on the Health & Wellness of Our Community*, which shows that Metro Denver residents boast the best average health ranking among 25 comparable cities. The report was compiled from a variety of local, state and other public health and economic sources, and may be viewed in its entirety with source citations at <http://www.mdhwc.org/>.

In the study, Metro Denver had the highest average ranking when comparing eight health indicators to those of citizens in 24 similar U.S. cities (see chart below). These eight indicators, integral to the MDHWC's mission, include physical activity, fruit and vegetable consumption, health care coverage, overweight and obesity rates, limitations on activities due to health and prevalence of hypertension, diabetes and asthma.

Compared with the other 24 metro areas, Metro Denver ranks in the top half of all but one of the indicators: prevalence of asthma – where Denver ranks 18th. The good news is that Metro Denver has the lowest percentage of adults with diabetes and second lowest percentage of overweight/obese adults – the San Francisco metro area squeezed into first place for lowest rate of overweight or obese residents.

Despite these impressive rankings and its overall first place position, Metro Denver residents are adding pounds quickly: Adults at a healthy weight dropped 9.2 percent between 1995 and 2005, and – despite having one of the leanest populations – nearly 54 percent of the region's adults were overweight or obese in 2005. Metro Denver adults also are just as likely to die of heart disease or to have cancer as the rest of the state or nation. In short, the metro area has room to improve its performance on key measurements such as obesity, along with physical activity and healthy eating. These measurements directly affect additional health problems and care costs, student performance, employers' bottom lines and ultimately regional economic vitality. The Metro Denver Health and Wellness Commission's public-private partnerships will focus on moving this obesity trend in a healthier direction.

"This report showcases the results of our continued commitment to being a healthy community," said Lt. Gov. Barbara O'Brien, chair of MDHWC. "However, we shouldn't celebrate too much, as our growing waistlines are expanding to levels of concern. Fortunately, we are in a better position than other regions to address the problem because of the on-going work of entities like the MDHWC."

The report also indicates pluses and minuses for Metro Denver children. The good news is that more than 72 percent of the region's kids participate in a sport or other physical activity five or more hours a week, and more than 65 percent drink less than one soda or sports drink per day. However, according to the report, nearly 29 percent of metro area children between two and 14 years old were overweight or at risk of becoming overweight, and only 12 percent of our region's children eat the recommended daily servings of fruits or vegetables.

The Commission's long-term goal is to make Metro Denver the healthiest in the nation and increase the community's vitality and economy. The first goal is to maintain the percentage of residents who are at a healthy weight by 2012, and the second is to increase the percentage of healthy weight residents by 2017. To accomplish these goals, the Commission will promote policies, both within businesses and government, to encourage worksite wellness programs, land-use planning for walkable communities and healthy food choices.

"This unique, first-of-its-kind organization of elected officials as well as nonprofit and business leaders is working to slow this 'speeding train' and reverse the obesity trend," said Dr. Jim Hill, Director of the Center for Human Nutrition at the University of Colorado at Denver and Health Sciences Center and co-chair of the MDHWC. "Of all the indicators measured in this report, reducing obesity can have the greatest impact. Our initiatives will work to educate Metro Denver so that we can each take simple, small steps leading to big change for our entire region."

Encouraging a healthier lifestyle has multiple economic benefits for Metro Denver; for example, healthy employees are more productive, take fewer sick days and generate lower employer health care costs. They also are happier and generally report being satisfied with their jobs.

"The connection between happy, healthy employees and economic success has been proven over and over," said Tom Clark, executive vice president of the Metro Denver Economic Development Corporation and co-chair of the MDHWC. "Metro Denver finds itself at an important crossroads – we can choose to stagnate physically and economically, or we can choose to address this obesity trend now while we can make a difference."

The MDHWC will focus on three key initiatives: healthiest worksites, healthiest schools/early childhood programs, and healthiest communities. To emphasize healthy worksites, the Commission's initiatives include publicizing proven 'templates' for worksite wellness programs that help employees incorporate exercise and healthy eating into their lifestyles. The MDHWC also will promote policies to reintroduce physical education and daily physical activity, along with healthful foods and nutrition education in metro area schools. Lastly, the MDHWC will work to incorporate land use and transportation designs that increase opportunities for safe walking or cycling to daily activities, access to parks, trails and community gardens, and other environmental changes supporting healthy eating and active living in our communities. The Commission's strategic plan, *MDHWC Strategic Plan 2007-2012--A*

Recipe to Create America's Healthiest Community, may be viewed in its entirety at <http://www.mdhwc.org/strategic.htm>.

The Commission will measure its initiatives' success over time by using the information in *Metro Denver 2007: A Report on the Health & Wellness of Our Community* as benchmark data for the Metro Denver's health.

About the Metro Denver Health and Wellness Commission:

The MDHWC is comprised of nearly 80 key leaders from Metro Denver academic, business, government, public health, health care, non-profit and philanthropic organizations. The Commission's vision is to make Metro Denver "America's Healthiest Community," with a focus on promoting programs and policies that support a culture of healthy eating and active living in schools, worksites, and communities and promote our economic wellbeing.

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| 25 Metropolitan Statistical Areas | Average Rank | Ordered by Average Rank |
|---|---------------------|--------------------------------|
| Metro Denver*, CO | 6.4 | 1 |
| Austin-Round Rock, TX | 9.3 | 2 |
| Seattle-Bellevue-Everett, WA | 9.6 | 3 |
| Salt Lake City, UT | 9.8 | 4 |
| Minneapolis-St. Paul-Bloomington, MN-WI | 10.3 | 5 |
| San Diego-Carlsbad-San Marcos, CA | 10.4 | 6 |
| Phoenix-Mesa-Scottsdale, AZ | 10.4 | 6 |
| Portland-Vancouver-Beaverton, OR-WA | 10.5 | 8 |
| San Francisco-Oakland-Fremont, CA | 10.8 | 9 |
| Cleveland-Elyria-Mentor, OH | 11.8 | 10 |
| Albuquerque, NM | 12.4 | 11 |
| Baltimore-Towson, MD | 12.8 | 12 |
| Columbus, OH | 12.9 | 13 |
| St. Louis, MO-IL | 13.4 | 14 |
| Atlanta-Sandy Springs-Marietta, GA | 13.9 | 15 |
| Las Vegas-Paradise, NV | 14.3 | 16 |
| Cincinnati-Middletown, OH-KY-IN | 14.4 | 17 |
| Orlando-Kissimmee, FL | 14.4 | 17 |
| Riverside-San Bernardino-Ontario, CA | 14.9 | 19 |
| Dallas-Plano-Irving, TX | 15.5 | 20 |
| Pittsburgh, PA | 15.5 | 20 |
| Kansas City, MO-KS | 16.3 | 22 |
| San Antonio, TX | 16.5 | 23 |
| Houston-Sugar Land-Baytown, TX | 17.4 | 24 |
| Tampa-St. Petersburg-Clearwater, FL | 18.8 | 25 |
| Based on National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System, 2005 Data for All MSAs | | |
| *Adams, Arapahoe, Boulder, Broomfield, Denver, Douglas and Jefferson Counties | | |