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## Greene County Public Health

*Melissa A. Howell, MS, MBA, MPH, RN, RS, Health Commissioner*

*Robert P. Dillaplain, MD, Medical Director*

# Press Release

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## **New County Health Rankings Show Differences in Health and Opportunity by Place and Race**

*Report Also Highlights Alarming Pattern of Racial Disparity in Low Birthweight; Greene County Ranks 14<sup>th</sup> out of 88*

**XENIA, OH** – Greene County now ranks as the **14th healthiest county in Ohio, out of 88 counties**, according to a new report released by the University of Wisconsin Population Health Institute (UWPHI) and the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF). Greene County was ranked 13<sup>th</sup> last year. Overall, Greene County's ranking has been relatively steady in the past few years but that doesn't mean entities and individuals don't have work to do to improve health.

For nearly a decade, the County Health Rankings have shown that where we live makes a difference in how well and how long we live. This year, our analyses show that meaningful health gaps persist not only by place but also by race and ethnicity. These health gaps are largely influenced by differences in opportunities that disproportionately affect people of color, such as access to quality education, jobs, and safe, affordable housing.

This year's report shows some troubling trends. For example, after nearly a decade of improvement, we are seeing more babies born at low birthweight (8.2% in 2016, a 2% increase from 2014)—low birthweight is a key indicator of quality of life for mothers and babies. A pattern of disparity by race in low birthweight can be seen across the nation, with poor birth outcomes more likely among Blacks.

Compared to White babies, Black babies are twice as likely to be born at low birthweight and about twice as likely to die before their first birthday. “We can't be a healthy, thriving nation if we continue to leave entire communities and populations behind,” said Richard Besser, MD, RWJF president and CEO. “Every community should use their County Health Rankings data, work together, and find solutions so that all babies, kids, and adults –regardless of their race or ethnicity – have the same opportunities to be healthy.”

The County Health Rankings & Roadmaps, a collaboration between the RWJF and UWPHI, compares counties within each state on more than 30 health-influencing factors such as education, jobs, and access to quality health care. The Rankings are available at [www.countyhealthrankings.org](http://www.countyhealthrankings.org).

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“As an organization committed to improving health and well-being, we can’t tolerate the reality that some Americans don’t have the same opportunity to be healthy because of where they live, how much money they make, or the color of their skin,” said Besser. “As a nation, we will be healthier and stronger together when we remove barriers to opportunity for everyone in America.”

This year’s Rankings explores important trends happening among the nation’s children and youth:

- **Teen Births:** There are strong ties between poverty and births among teens. Teen birth rates have been declining across community types and racial groups for more than a decade, with most recent data showing a US rate of 27 per 1,000 females, ages 15-19. Hispanic teens have seen the most improvement in birth rates, falling from 77.7 to 31.9 births per 1,000 females-- ages 15-19, from 2006 to 2016. Black and American Indian/Alaskan Native teens have also seen notable improvements. Teen birth rates are highest among counties in the Southwest and Southeast as well as parts of Appalachia, the Mississippi Delta, and the Plains regions. These regions have seen little change over the last decade, while the East and West Coasts have seen improvements.
- **Children in Poverty:** Poverty limits opportunities and increases the chance of poor health. Today, 1 in 5 children grow up in poverty. Available data show that, for the majority of U.S. counties, child poverty rates for American Indian/Alaskan Native, Black, or Hispanic children are higher than rates for White children, and these rates are often twice as high. “The time is now to address long-standing challenges like child poverty and residential segregation,” said Julie Willems Van Dijk, PhD, RN, director of County Health Rankings & Roadmaps. “This year’s Rankings are a call to action to see how these persistent health gaps play out locally, take an honest look at their root causes, and work together to give everyone a fair shot at a healthier life.”

The Rankings website also features *What Works for Health*, a database of nearly 400 evidence-informed strategies to support local changemakers as they take steps toward building healthy communities. Each strategy is rated for its evidence of effectiveness and likely impact on health disparities. The Rankings’ Take Action Center and Community Coaches also provide valuable guidance for local leaders and community partners to move with data to action.

The *2017 Greene County Community Health Improvement Plan* identifies four areas for Greene County to make improvements in overall health. Access to care was a cross cutting factor in all four areas. All women should receive prenatal care in the first three months of pregnancy. We have seen a decline in the percent of women receiving care in the first three months of pregnancy and we believe that improvements will occur if the health of women improves before they become pregnant. This means females should receive adequate and regular healthcare from the time they are born up until they conceive. The second area to improve is our obesity rates. We need to go beyond eating less and moving more. Greene County has a wealth of resources for

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physical activity and *Greene Spaces* is a great resource for finding out about these locations. Counting calories, establishing community gardens and monitoring macronutrients is a great way to ensure a healthy diet is consumed. Improvements in quality of life can occur if mental health issues and substance use is treated and individuals have access to ongoing recovery. Prevention efforts should begin early in life and strengthen coping and parenting skills, while violence in our homes should be reduced. Finally, there is concern in Greene County for falls in the senior adult population. Chronic disease, inactivity and living alone are all areas to be addressed with this population.

Visit [countyhealthrankings.org](http://countyhealthrankings.org) to learn more.

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