



County of Malheur

HEALTH DEPARTMENT

1108 S.W. 4th Street • Ontario, OR 97914 • (541) 889-7279

May 14, 2021
For Immediate Release

Teen birth rate on a steady decline in Malheur County

Despite being ranked among the least healthy counties in Oregon, Malheur County's scores on the annual [County Health Rankings](#) report released earlier this year are not all bad. In fact, when it comes to violent crime rates and drunk-driving deaths, Malheur County is doing better than the state average. It has also shown marked improvement over previous years in teen births and the percentage of children living in poverty.

The teen birth rate has made a steady decline in Malheur County over previous years, from 65 out of every 1,000 females age 15-19 in the 2016 report to 37/1,000 in the 2021 report. Malheur County still leads the state in teen births – the average is 17 – but by progressively narrower margins. The percentage of children living in poverty in Malheur County has also steadily declined since the 2016 report, from 38% to 25%. The state average is 14%.

“Our teen birth rate, while still significantly higher than the state average, has decreased for the fifth year in a row and that’s worth celebrating,” Malheur County Health Department Director Sarah Poe said. “Teen births are often tied to high school incompleteness and poverty. Waiting to get pregnant can have lifelong impacts on entire families. We encourage any teen who has questions or concerns about pregnancy to call our office and take advantage of the services that are available to them.”

Among the many public health [services](#) offered by the Health Department are family planning and birth control, pregnancy testing and counseling, maternal and child health services, immunizations, and WIC. All services are confidential and available to anyone in the community, regardless of ability to pay.

Overall this year, Malheur County is ranked 28th for health outcomes of 34 participating Oregon counties. Health outcomes include length of life and quality of life. Malheur County is ranked 34th of 34 participating counties for health factors, which include health behaviors, clinical care, social and economic factors, and physical environment. Only two Oregon counties, Gilliam and Wheeler, were not included in the county health rankings due to insufficient data.

The report also highlights areas where Malheur County's health and health habits have declined: Diabetes prevalence has increased, as have adult obesity and smoking. Adult obesity rose from 36% in the 2020 report to 40% in the 2021 report. The state average is 29%. Adult smoking rose from 17% in the 2020 report to 22% in the 2021 report. The state average is 16%. Physical inactivity and excessive drinking are also up slightly.

(MORE)

The Malheur County Health Department does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, national origin, age, disability, sex, marital status, familial status, sexual orientation, religion, gender identity, political beliefs or source of income. Interpreter services and/or other assistive aids are provided at our facility at no cost. Our facility is accessible.

There are additional ways public health can address these areas of concern, Poe said.

“WIC is a supplemental nutrition program for pregnant women and children up to the age of 5. Our WIC staff and dietitian can help families stay healthy while cutting costs in their food budget. Our Tobacco Prevention and Education Program has many resources from smokefreeoregon.com to support individuals, retailers, and cities. The PRIME program connects Certified Recovery Mentors with people who use drugs and provides compassionate, trauma-informed care. There is something the Malheur County Health Department does for every person who lives in our county, regardless of age, income, or legal status. We want our work to improve lives and make a difference in health outcomes. I encourage any Malheur County resident to call us to learn how we can help.”

The annual rankings report is published by the [University of Wisconsin Population Health Institute](#) and the [Robert Wood Johnson Foundation](#). The rankings provide a snapshot of how health is influenced by where we live, learn, work and play. This year’s rankings include data through 2019 and are not yet reflective of the impact that COVID-19 has had on counties; however, the pandemic has exacerbated the differences in health and opportunity by place. In its 2021 Message to the Field, the report states, “While all are suffering, those who came into the pandemic with the fewest opportunities are likely to exit it with an even greater burden. This crisis has only deepened the avoidable and unfair gaps that Black, Latino, Indigenous, and some Asian-American communities faced pre-COVID-19 in jobs with fair pay, housing, education, and more.”

###

The Malheur County Health Department does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, national origin, age, disability, sex, marital status, familial status, sexual orientation, religion, gender identity, political beliefs or source of income. Interpreter services and/or other assistive aids are provided at our facility at no cost. Our facility is accessible.