

PUBLIC HEALTH IMPROVEMENT PARTNERSHIP

LOCAL PUBLIC HEALTH INDICATORS

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Who is the audience?

The local public health indicators website was developed for local public health agencies and health policy makers throughout the state.

What is the purpose of this website?

The purpose of the website is to provide data to help measure the health of Washington communities.

What can the data be used for?

The data can be used to identify health differences and areas of concern across the state; identify the need for policy or program change to improve health outcomes; determine whether health improvement strategies are working; and report the results of public health activities to the Legislature, boards of health and other policy makers.

Should I use the local public health indicator website instead of my own locally developed indicators?

No. The local public health indicators are tool that can be used to augment locally developed indicator data. They should not replace indicators your local health agency and/or community may already be using to monitor health. The local public health indicators provide a statewide view of small set of public health outcomes, allowing comparisons between Washington's communities. Some local officials may choose to track additional health indicators based on the needs of the local community.

Why are some of the indicator data on the Local Public Health Indicator website different from data that I obtain from other Department of Health data resources?

Differences in data can result from differences in how the indicators are defined (who is included or excluded) and whether the reported rates are age-adjusted or crude. Differences may also be due to using augmented or more up-to-date data sets than what is available elsewhere. For example, hospitalization data reported from other data resources may include only acute care hospitals in Washington; the hospitalization data in the local public health indicators has been augmented to include information on Washington residents hospitalized in military hospitals and hospitals in Oregon. Differences may also be evident for indicator data that come from Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance Surveys, particularly for local health jurisdictions that collect additional samples for their region. The technical notes section on the website explains that data sources and definitions. Additional helps is available by contacting us.



The website says that these indicators are 'actionable.' What action should I take if my health jurisdictions appear to be 'worse' on some indicator?

Analyze the data and try to understand it. Check for incomplete or variable reporting to see if the 'worse' rating is a real problem or simply an artifact of reporting. If the problem is real, consider demographic, economic and other factors that may affect this indicator. Use additional data to examine trends and identify high risk groups based on age, race/ethnicity and other socioeconomic factors. Identify evidence-based prevention strategies that are likely to be effective with the target population. Work with your local and state assessment staff; they can help.

When will the website be updated?

The Department of Health plans to update the local public health indicators website every two years. The next update is planned for Spring 2014.