Health is not only an individual matter; it is also a community matter. Accessibility of health care facilities, public policy, and environmental conditions, for example, all affect individual and community health.

Each year the United Health Foundation, American Public Health Association, and Partnership for Prevention produce America’s Health Rankings, a set of data used to measure and track the health of the nation.

In this Stat Chat, we select and present some of these data as well as those from the County Health Rankings project, produced by the University of Wisconsin Population Health Institute, to illustrate the Commonwealth’s current health status. These data allow us to compare Virginia to the other 49 states and to compare each locality to other localities in the Commonwealth.

The state health rankings are based on 23 separate measures that America’s Health Rankings researchers combine into a single, comprehensive measure of the health of each state. These measures fall into five categories:

- Behaviors
- Community and Environment
- Public and Health Policies
- Clinical Care
- Health Outcomes

The specific measures, which include statistics such as the prevalence of binge drinking and the number of cardiovascular deaths, represent a broad range of issues that affect a population’s health.

Virginia is currently ranked as the 20th healthiest state in the U.S. by America’s Health Rankings. Some of the Commonwealth’s strengths are a low violent crime rate, ready access to early prenatal care, and a relatively low percentage of children in poverty. Some current challenges are low levels of immunization coverage, high levels of air pollution, and a high prevalence of smoking.
Among the 131 Virginia localities ranked by the County Health Rankings program, Fairfax County is the healthiest and Petersburg City is the least healthy. The healthiest localities (shaded green in the map below) tend to be concentrated in the state's major metropolitan areas, while the least healthy localities (shaded red) tend to be in the economically disadvantaged areas of Southside and Southwest Virginia.

Ten Healthiest Counties
1) Fairfax County 6) Alexandria City
2) Arlington 7) James City County
3) Loudoun 8) Clarke
4) Albemarle 9) Powhatan
5) York 10) Mathews

Ten Least Healthy Counties
122) Wise 127) Franklin City
123) Henry 128) Dickenson
124) Russell 129) Buchanan
125) Richmond City 130) Emporia City
126) Tazewell 131) Petersburg City

* Highland County, Norton City, and Lexington City were not ranked.
Diet and Exercise

In addition to ranking the overall health of each county, the County Health Rankings program also ranks a series of 13 health factors, including alcohol use, diet and exercise, environmental quality, community safety, and quality of clinical care. These health factor rankings provide specific, actionable information for communities.

The map above shows an example of one set of county rankings - diet and exercise habits. The counties shown in brown have the most problems with diet and exercise. Communities can use the health factor rankings to identify areas for improvement.

The County Health Rankings program also provides a "Roadmap," which can be used by community leaders, healthcare professionals, and government officials to identify programs and policies that can improve health at the local, state, and national level.

Detailed state and county health rankings, health factor rankings, and roadmaps are available at www.americashealthrankings.org and www.countyhealthrankings.org. The County Health Rankings website provides examples of specific programs and policies that have been found to work in different areas of the country as well as resources providing general information that can be used by localities to improve health and make communities healthier places to live, learn, work, and play.