



## **No. 1 Again: St. Johns County tops Florida County Health Rankings**

By Stuart Korfhage  
March 19, 2019

For the eighth year in a row, St. Johns County has been named the healthiest county in Florida County Health Rankings, released today by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and the University of Wisconsin Population Health Institute.

According to the 2019 Rankings, the five healthiest counties in Florida are St. Johns County, followed by Collier County, Martin County, Seminole County, and Miami-Dade County. The five counties in the poorest health are Union County, Putnam County, Dixie County, Bradford County and Gadsden County.

The county's high level of income and educated populace helped keep this county at the top of the ratings.

The rankings are based on a variety of factors based on environment and behavior.

St. Johns County was propelled to the top of the list based on its top scores in the Quality of Life and Social and Economic Factors categories. The county had one of the lowest unemployment rates in the state and the entire country last year at 3.3 percent.

Residents here have one of the highest levels of education in the nation, too. County Health Rankings said 78 percent of the county population had at least some college education.

Because of this county's high median household income — rated No. 1 in recent U.S. Census reports — there is an extremely low number of children living in poverty at 9 percent. The state average is about 21 percent, according to this report.

The only aspects of the rankings in which the county did not fare well was in Physical Environment. St. Johns County ranked 52nd in that category, mostly due to the fact that there is little in the way of public transportation and 81 percent of the workforce drives to work alone.

Overall, the rankings report shows that the county has maintained a high living standard while experiencing rapid residential and visitor growth.

Anne Roubal, population health analyst with the County Health Rankings & Roadmaps, said the St. Johns County economic data is generally very good, but there are some spots for improvement.

“We know social and economic factors are important drivers for health, St. Johns also ranks No. 1 in the SES factors so it is not surprising that they also continue to rank well in health outcomes,” Roubal said in an email to The Record. “The county’s unemployment, children in poverty, and violent crime rates all continue to improve (as does Florida as a whole), which will likely lead to future improvement in health outcomes at the county level.

“However, if you break down the data by race on the snapshot you can see that black children are more than three times more likely to grow up in poverty compared to white children. So, even though they rank well, this may be an indication that health is not equally distributed for all residents in the county.”

While St. Johns County has seen its residents struggle with increased housing costs, it’s something that has affected much of the state.

In Florida, 18 percent of households spend more than half of their income on housing cost. The report showed even deeper differences emerge with households headed by black residents most burdened by severe housing costs at 26 percent compared to white resident households at 14 percent. County by county, severe housing cost burden ranges from 8 percent to 27 percent of households.

St. Johns County had 13 percent of its residents severely cost burdened by housing, according to the Health Rankings report.

“This year’s County Health Rankings data offers an opportunity to dig deeper into the connection between financial health and physical health, which are intrinsically linked,” said Dr. Roderick King, CEO of the Florida Institute for Health Innovation, in a press release. “Financial well-being is a key social determinant of health that must be addressed through cross-sector collaboration and by building new, innovative partnerships between the health and finance sectors to create systems that are more consumer-centric and outcomes-focused.”