

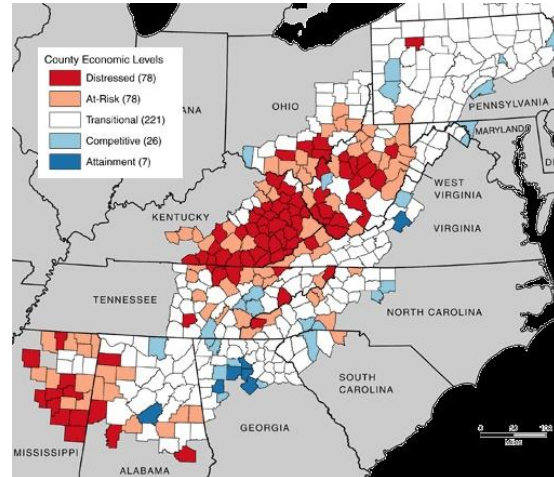
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People in Poorest Parts of Appalachia Have Higher Risk of Diabetes, Study Finds

- Living in a “distressed” Appalachian county increases the risk of diabetes by 33 percent
- Results could help Appalachia qualify for federal funding designed to eliminate health disparities



Source: Preventing Chronic Disease (used by permission)

HUNTINGTON, W.Va. – Simply living in an economically distressed county in Appalachia is enough to substantially increase a person’s odds of having diabetes, researchers from the Centers for Disease Control, Ohio University and Marshall University’s Joan C. Edwards School of Medicine report.

Their research appears in the September issue of Preventing Chronic Disease.

The researchers used data for the 13 states that include at least one Appalachian county to compare diabetes rates for people who live in Appalachian vs. non-Appalachian counties. They also looked at the Appalachian counties in five tiers of economic development, using classifications from the Appalachian Regional Commission.

After adjusting for known risk factors (such as age, race and obesity) and other variables, researchers found that the people living in “distressed” Appalachian counties had a 33 percent higher risk of diabetes, compared to people living in the non-Appalachian counties and the non-distressed Appalachian counties.



“The findings are important because they document the health disparity that exists in rural, poor counties in Appalachia,” said co-author Richard Crespo, Ph.D., of Marshall. “These data can be used to give evidence of the need in Appalachia, which historically has not been eligible for federal health grants targeted to health disparity populations.”

Crespo said people working in Appalachia have long perceived that those

Distressed Counties By State

Alabama

Franklin
Hale
Macon
Pickens

Kentucky

Bell
Breathitt
Carter
Casey
Clay
Clinton
Cumberland
Elliott
Estill
Floyd
Harlan
Jackson
Johnson
Knott
Knox
Lawrence
Lee
Leslie
Letcher
Lewis
Magoffin
Martin
McCreary
Menifee
Monroe
Morgan
Owsley
Perry
Powell
Rockcastle

in the distressed counties have heightened health risks. “This research shows for the first time the objective data to back up our impressions and our experience: people in distressed counties are at higher risk,” he said.

Lawrence Barker, Ph.D., the report’s lead author, said several factors could contribute to the increased health risk.

“The higher risk of diabetes in the poorest Appalachian counties could be caused by factors that make it more difficult to stay healthy, such as limited availability of fresh fruits and vegetables and a shortage of safe places to be physically active,” said Barker, a senior scientist in the CDC’s Division of Diabetes Translation. “Barriers to receiving medical care also may raise the risk.”

In their article, the authors said programs aimed at lowering obesity and increasing physical activity in Appalachia, especially in distressed counties, can help address the problem.

The researchers identified the heightened risk for people in distressed counties by analyzing information provided by nearly 200,000 people as part of the CDC’s Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System. Using statistical methods that allowed them to filter out the effects of other variables, they compared survey responses from people in Appalachian counties classified as “distressed” (among the bottom 10 percent of the nation’s counties in economic development) to responses from the other counties studied.

Appalachia includes all of West Virginia and parts of 12 other states reaching from New York to Mississippi. Nine of the states have counties classified as economically distressed, with the highest numbers found in Kentucky, West Virginia and Mississippi.

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ADDITIONAL DETAILS

Article link: http://www.cdc.gov/pcd/issues/2010/sep/09_0203.htm

Data source details: The Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System is based on surveys of people who have land-line telephones. Respondents were considered to have diabetes if they answered yes when asked whether a doctor ever told them they had the disease.

Distressed counties: The Appalachian Regional Commission classifies the economic development of counties into five tiers by comparing them to others in the nation based on 3-year unemployment rate, per capita income and poverty rate. Distressed counties are those that fall in the worst 10 percent in the nation; for the period covered by the study, 78 of the 410 Appalachian counties fell in this tier. Researchers calculated the risk separately for each of the five development categories.

Russell
Wayne
Whitley
Wolfe

Mississippi

Benton
Chickasaw
Choctaw
Clay
Kemper
Montgomery
Noxubee
Panola
Webster
Winston

North Carolina

Graham

Ohio

Athens
Meigs
Pike
Vinton

Pennsylvania

Forest

Tennessee

Cocke
Fentress
Grundy
Hancock
Johnson
Pickett
Scott

Virginia

Dickenson

West

Virginia

Barbour
Braxton
Calhoun
Clay
Fayette
Gilmer
Lincoln
Logan
Mason
McDowell
Mingo
Roane
Summers
Webster
Wirt
Wyoming