

Opportunities for Prevention

There are opportunities for preventing diseases and premature death throughout DeKalb County and its communities. They may be found where disparities in health are observed. These disparities are seen where rates of health behaviors, disease or death vary widely among demographic groups (by age, sex, race/ethnicity) or among geographic regions (Community Health Assessment Areas).

Many aspects of community life contribute to health. Opportunities for prevention can be found among any of the factors that affect health status: personal lifestyle choices, the health care system, policies, and the physical and social environments. These factors are not independent of each other, and changes in one factor may complement or support changes in another. For example, individuals who decide to eat more fruits and vegetables will need accessible and affordable food choices in their community and workplace for this lifestyle change to be effective. In this example, a lifestyle choice would be supported by changes in policies and the environment.

Based on the Status of Health priority areas (promoting healthy eating and physical activity, reducing tobacco use, preventing injuries and eliminating health disparities) and the four factors of health status (personal lifestyle choices, the health care system, policies, and the physical and social environments), the following are just a few examples of opportunities for prevention in DeKalb County:

Actions for Healthy Lifestyles

Increase physical activity and eat better - Take the stairs, take the dog for a walk, drink more water, eat five fruits and vegetables a day. See www.smallstep.gov or www.5aday.gov for more ideas on incorporating movement into your everyday life and improving your diet.

Avoid tobacco - If you smoke, stop; if you don't smoke, don't start. Call the toll-free Georgia Tobacco Quit Line (1-877-270-STOP) to get help to quit smoking.

Drive responsibly and practice injury prevention - Wear your seatbelt, use child-safety seats, limit driver distractions, don't drink and drive. See www.safekids.org for more safety tips.

Actions for the Health Care System

Increase culturally competent resources - Provide translation services, train health care staff on cultural competency issues. See www.omhrc.gov about cultural competence issues.

Promote a comprehensive plan for health promotion and disease prevention - Partner with other providers, implement weight control and disease management strategies.

Actions for Healthy Policies

Support clean indoor air ordinances - Don't allow smoking in confined areas, advocate for local and state ordinances. Contact the Prevention Alliance for Tobacco Control and Health (PATCH) coalition to find out about clean indoor air ordinances in DeKalb County: www.dekalbhealth.net/community-collaborations/tobacco-prevention.asp .

Develop healthy workplaces - Provide healthy food options in cafeterias, promote use of stairs, provide time for physical fitness.

Implement a plan for healthy schools - Support implementation of the nutrition and physical activity policy in all DeKalb County schools, advocate for policies to keep our children healthy. See www.cdc.gov/HealthyYouth for information on school health.

Actions for a Healthy Environment

Build and maintain safe communities - Improve lighting on roads and sidewalks and construct sidewalks, pedestrian refuge islands and crosswalks. See www.nhtsa.dot.gov/people/injury/safe_communities for information about making your community safer.

Participate in partnerships with community groups - Work to improve the social and physical environment of areas suffering from health disparities. See www.healthydekalb.org for information about community partnerships.

Healthy communities mean more than the absence of disease and early death. Intact, supportive families; economic vitality leading to quality jobs; clean and safe environments; and trusted and effective institutions (school, faith, health, government and business), social associations and alliances that respect diversity all contribute to the quality of life in DeKalb County. Community assets are the essential building blocks for preventing disease and premature deaths. These same assets are the resources that also preserve the advances that have occurred in health status. Healthy people grow up and live in healthy communities.

Prevention Opportunities

Premature mortality is preventable. Experts estimate that more than 50% of the disease and conditions that lead to early death can be eliminated. A practical approach focuses on the risk factors that lead to disease. By identifying and reducing risk factors, communities reduce premature death. The following table depicts the relationship between several important risk factors and the diseases and conditions described in this report.

Table 22. Risk reduction by disease or condition

Prevention by Risk Reduction	HIV/AIDS	Injuries	Cancer	Homicide	Heart Disease	Suicide	Stroke	Infant Health	Teen Pregnancy
Eat a healthy diet			X		X		X	X	
Maintain normal body weight					X		X	X	
Exercise regularly					X		X		
Control blood pressure					X		X		
Control blood sugar					X		X	X	
Reduce cholesterol					X		X		
Avoid tobacco use		X	X		X		X	X	X
Reduce alcohol consumption		X	X	X		X		X	X
Avoid drug use	X	X	X	X		X		X	X
Avoid sexual risks	X		X						X
Avoid violence/stress		X		X	X	X			
Limit availability of guns		X		X		X			
Use seatbelts		X							
Use car seats		X							
Avoid sun exposure			X						
Perform breast self exam			X						
Perform testicular self exam			X						
Have a colorectal exam			X						
Have a mammogram			X						
Have a Pap smear			X						
Plan families								X	X