



COMMUNITY HEALTH DATA BASE

An Information Service of Public Health Management Corporation

Data findings

FOCUS ON WOMEN’S HEALTH IN SOUTHEASTERN PENNSYLVANIA

May 2008

The 9th Annual National Women's Health Week kicks off in less than two weeks – on Mother's Day, Sunday, May 11. Coordinated by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' Office on Women's Health (OWH), National Women's Health Week empowers women across the country to get healthy by taking action. The initiative encourages women to make their health a top priority and take simple steps for a longer, healthier and happier life.

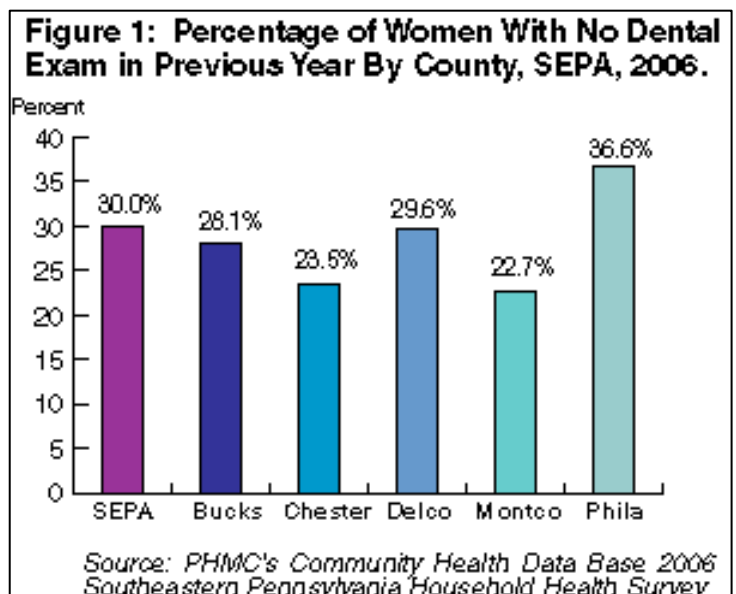
During the week, families, communities, businesses, government, health organizations and other groups work together to educate women about steps that can be taken to improve their physical and mental health and prevent disease. Particular focus is given to: (1) Engaging in physical activity most days of the week; (2) Making healthy food choices; (3) Visiting a healthcare provider to receive regular check-ups and preventive screenings; and (4) Avoiding risky behaviors, like smoking and not wearing a seatbelt. This week of activities and attention to women’s health concerns will also include National Women’s Check-Up Day on Monday, May 12.

In honor of National Women’s Health Week, this month the CHDB presents you with data focusing on the health of women in our region, based on data collected in PHMC’s 2006 Southeastern Pennsylvania (SEPA) Household Health Survey. This article will focus on some of the key issues highlighted by Women’s Health Week, including check-ups and preventive screenings, physical activity, smoking, and nutrition among adult women ages 18 and older.

CHECK-UPS AND PREVENTIVE SCREENINGS AMONG SEPA WOMEN

For many people with demanding schedules, making time for regular visits to the health care provider can fall right off the “To Do” list. Nevertheless, routine visits, preventive screenings, and a strong relationship with a familiar health care provider can be an important component of good health. The need for certain screenings varies greatly by age and other risk factors, but here we take a look at some of the most common and important for most women:

- Annual visit to a health care provider: About 12.2% of women had not visited a doctor or other health care provider in the previous year, representing about 195,000 women. Among the five SEPA counties, Chester County had the highest proportion of women (14.5%, or about 27,000



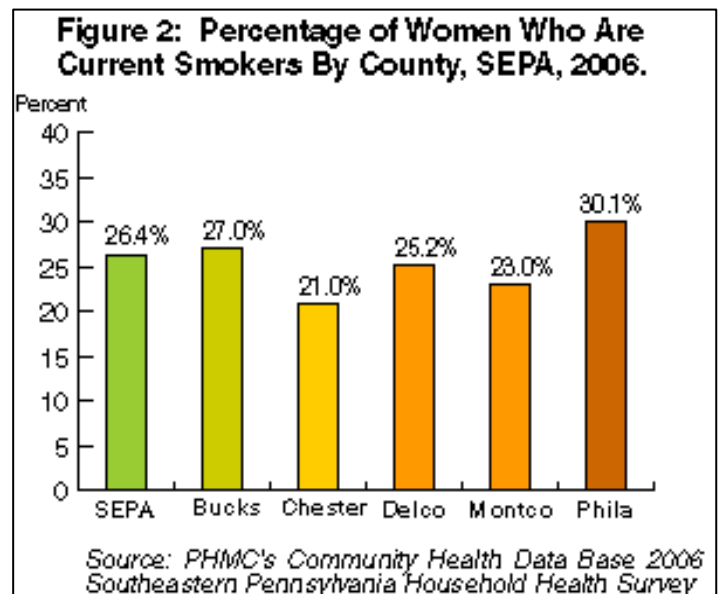
women) who had not visited a health care provider in the previous year.

- High blood pressure or hypertension and cholesterol: 8.4% of women had not received a high blood pressure screening in the previous year. Montgomery County had the highest prevalence at 9.8%, and Delaware County the lowest, at 7.0%. Nearly three in ten women (28.5%) in SEPA had not received a cholesterol screen in the previous year.
- Cervical cancer screening (pap test): Nearly two out of ten women had not had a screening for cervical cancer in the previous year; this represents approximately 300,000 women in SEPA. The highest prevalence of no cervical cancer screening was in Bucks County (21.6%) and the lowest was in Chester County (15.9%).
- Clinical breast exam: Over one-quarter of all SEPA women (27.0%) had not received a clinical breast exam in the previous year. This represents about 430,000 women in SEPA. Chester County had the highest prevalence of women who had received a breast exam, at 77.6%.
- Mammography: Among women 40 and older, approximately 35% had not had a mammogram in the previous year. This prevalence was similar across all five counties.
- HIV testing: Although not yet a routine screening, recent CDC guidelines have recommended that HIV testing become a more common part of a general physical exam. In SEPA, only about 18% of women had received an HIV test in the previous year; over eight out of ten women (82.1%) did not receive HIV testing.
- Dental exam: Also not often considered part of the standard slate of preventive screenings, oral health is nonetheless crucial to overall physical well-being. Approximately one-third of SEPA women did not have a dental exam in the previous year; this represents about 480,000 women in SEPA with no recent dental exam.

HEALTH BEHAVIORS

National Women’s Health Week also encourages women to take steps towards exercising regularly and eating a balanced diet, as well as decreasing tobacco and alcohol consumption. The majority of women in SEPA already engages in health-promoting behaviors such as regular exercise and fresh produce consumption. However, there is more work to be done in these areas.

- Smoking: Approximately one in five women (20.8%) in SEPA are current smokers, meaning they smoke some days or every day. This represents about 330,000 women in SEPA. This prevalence is highest in Philadelphia County (24.8% of women smoke), followed by Delaware (20.3%), Bucks (19.7%), Chester (17.2%), and Montgomery (16.7%) Counties.
- Heavy alcohol consumption: In SEPA overall, about 3.2% of women report that they had five or more drinks on five or more occasions in the previous month (one way of identifying heavy drinking habits). This proportion was highest in Chester county (4.1%) and lowest in Philadelphia (2.9%) and Delaware (2.8%) Counties.
- Fresh fruits and vegetables: Only about one in six women in SEPA (16.8%) consume the recommended five-plus daily servings of fruits and vegetables. In Chester County, the proportion of women who consume five or more servings of fruits and vegetables per day is highest in SEPA at 21.7%; Philadelphia has the lowest percentage at only 11.8%.



- Regular physical activity: Over half of SEPA women (56.9%) engage in some form of exercise (for 30 minutes or more) at least three days per week. However, this means that 43% of women do not exercise for 30 minutes or more three days per week. Chester County has the highest percentage of women who exercise three or more times per week (62.7%); the other four counties are similar to the SEPA average.

SUMMARY

The 2006 SEPA Household Health Survey findings suggest that the majority of women in Southeastern Pennsylvania are engaging in health promoting activities such as receiving annual health screenings, not smoking, and exercise with some regularity. However, many women in SEPA still face significant barriers to healthier living, such as lack of or inadequate health insurance (including lack of dental or reproductive health coverage), limited access to safe places for physical activity, lack of availability of fresh, quality produce, gender inequality in pay scale, and other economic constraints such as unemployment or working multiple jobs to make ends meet. National Women's Health Week provides an opportunity to take time to consider the specific health concerns, strengths, and barriers faced by women and strategize about new ways to eliminate barriers and enhance health outcomes for everyone, both in the region and across the country.

To learn more about the Community Health Data Base, please contact CHDB researcher Allegra Gordon at 215-985-6238 or agordon@phmc.org.

For more information or to get involved in National Women's Health Week, visit: <http://www.4women.gov/whw/>.

