

Community HealthWatch

January 2000

Focus on Chronic Disease

The Community HealthWatch report cards are developed by the Kent County Health Department to present health information that is being monitored by Healthy Kent 2010, a community health committee dedicated to improving our county's health. This report card focuses on chronic disease. Because most chronic disease results from lifestyle behaviors -- cigarette smoking, lack of exercise, poor eating habits, among others -- education emphasizing prevention is a priority. Chronic disease continues to disproportionately affect communities of color and people of lower socioeconomic status; additional information on these disparities is presented in the Health Department's annual community health status report.

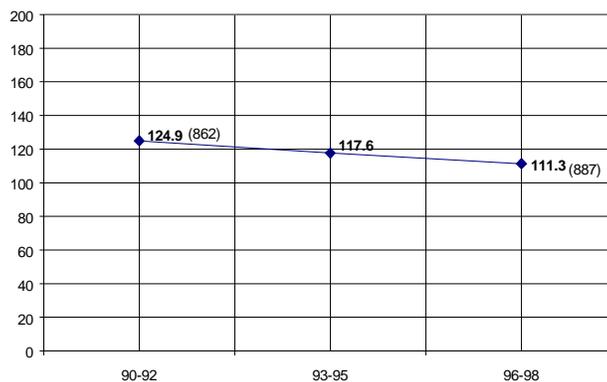
Rates, in bold, are three year averages of deaths per 100,000 Kent County residents. Numbers in parentheses are three year averages of the *number* of deaths from each disease in Kent County.

Heart Disease Deaths



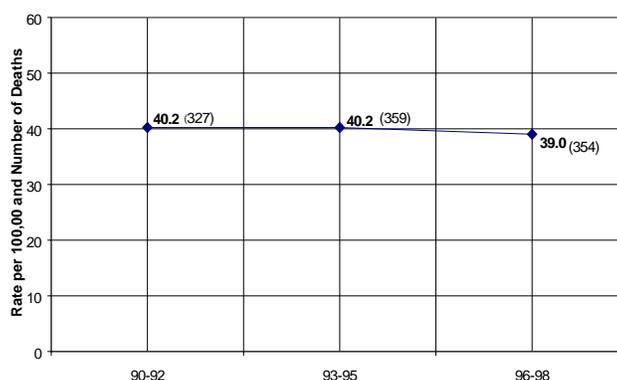
One of the great public health achievements of the last fifty years has been the significant decline in deaths from **heart disease**. In Kent County, heart disease death rates have declined by 12% over the last decade. However, and in spite of this decline, heart disease continues to be the leading cause of death in our County, the State of Michigan, and the U.S. Heart disease accounts for 31% of all Kent County deaths.

Cancer Deaths



Cancer is the second leading cause of death in Kent County. Although local **cancer** death rates have decreased by 10% since 1990-92, research indicates that cancer incidence may be reduced 50% or more through smoking cessation and changed dietary habits. Early cancer detection programs, such as the Women's Health Network, and access to "state-of-the-art" treatment may continue to spur a decline in cancer deaths.

Diabetes-Related Deaths



The rate of **diabetes**-related deaths in Kent County has remained relatively stable over the last decade. Increased awareness of this disease generally, as well as an increased emphasis on the prevention and control of adult-onset diabetes have likely contributed to this decline. Prolonging and improving the quality of life for those with diabetes will be a challenge for the health care community in the 21st century.