The Health of Southwest Queens

(Including Howard Beach, Kew Gardens, Ozone Park, Richmond Hill, and Woodhaven)
This community health profile highlights important health issues facing the residents of Southwest Queens, with a special focus on preventable causes of illness and death. Preventing illness requires people making healthy life choices, neighborhood resources that promote healthy living, and high-quality, accessible medical care.

New York City is the most diverse city in the U.S. This is reflected in the unique character of each neighborhood. Strategies to improve New Yorkers’ health should take local concerns into account and be based on an understanding of how decisions at the city level affect local residents. The burden of illness and death does not fall equally across New York City’s neighborhoods. One of the primary goals of the Department of Health and Mental Hygiene is to reduce and eliminate these disparities by improving health in communities with the greatest need.

Improving the health of all New Yorkers requires the involvement and cooperation of individual residents, community-based organizations, and the public health community. We hope that this health profile will support this effort in Southwest Queens and across New York City.

Thomas R. Frieden, MD, MPH
Commissioner

Snapshots
From the Census

Age
One quarter of Southwest Queens residents are children and 1 in 9 is over 65 years of age

Children (0-17 years) 25%
Adults (18-64 years) 64%
Adults (65 years and above) 11%

Southwest Queens New York City

Race/Ethnicity
Compared to New York City as a whole, more people in Southwest Queens are of Asian and multiple race/ethnicities

Southwest Queens New York City

Country of Origin
More than 4 in 10 residents of Southwest Queens were born outside the U.S. (Top 3 countries of origin: Guyana, Trinidad and Tobago, Dominican Republic)

Southwest Queens New York City

44% foreign-born 36% foreign-born
This summary shows how the health of residents of Southwest Queens compares to 41 other neighborhoods in New York City. In general, people living in Southwest Queens have a moderate burden of illness and mortality. The challenge of improving these indicators does not fall only on neighborhood residents but is a shared responsibility between all sectors of society.

Southwest Queens compared to 41 other NYC neighborhoods

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Below Average (bottom 10)</th>
<th>Average (middle 22)</th>
<th>Above Average (top 10)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>General health</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maternal and child health</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Infectious diseases (including pneumonia, influenza, HIV/AIDS)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chronic diseases (including heart disease, diabetes, lung diseases)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prevention in doctors’ offices (including cancer screening and immunizations)</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Access to medical care</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Please see the technical notes on page 11 for details on how these measures were calculated.

In a recent survey, adults in Southwest Queens and across New York City were asked to rate their own health. The options were “Excellent,” “Very Good,” “Good,” “Fair,” and “Poor.” In Southwest Queens, 22% said their health is “Poor” or “Fair.” How people rate their own health is a good indication of the overall health of a community.
Heart disease and cancer caused the most deaths in 2001 among Southwest Queens residents. The death rates for most causes were lower in Southwest Queens than in New York City as a whole.

### Leading Causes of Death in Southwest Queens, 2001

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No. of deaths</th>
<th>Southwest Queens</th>
<th>New York City</th>
<th>Southwest Queens compared to NYC as a whole</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Death rate (per 100,000 people)</td>
<td>Death rate (per 100,000 people)</td>
<td>Higher by</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All causes</td>
<td>1,504 658</td>
<td>736</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heart disease</td>
<td>675 306</td>
<td>304</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cancer</td>
<td>350 150</td>
<td>167</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stroke</td>
<td>49 22</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diabetes</td>
<td>47 20</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pneumonia and influenza</td>
<td>43 20</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chronic lung disease</td>
<td>37 16</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accidents and injuries</td>
<td>36 15</td>
<td>15</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AIDS</td>
<td>26 10</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>55%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liver disease</td>
<td>20 8</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neurologic disease and dementia</td>
<td>17 7</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Age-adjusted

### Premature death

People who die before age 75 can be thought of as dying prematurely. The difference between 75 years and the age of a person who dies before that is called the “years of potential life lost.” Almost half the years of potential life lost in Southwest Queens were due to 2 causes: cancer and heart disease/stroke. Smoking is, by far, the leading preventable cause of these illnesses.
Causes of hospitalization

Heart disease is the leading cause of adult hospitalization in Southwest Queens. The hospitalization data also reveal the burden of illness due to mental illness, alcohol abuse, and drug use, as well as injuries and asthma. Hospitalization rates in Southwest Queens are lower than in New York City as a whole.

Leading Causes of Hospitalization in Adults in Southwest Queens, 2001

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Southwest Queens</th>
<th>New York City</th>
<th>Southwest Queens compared to NYC as a whole</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No. of admissions</td>
<td>Admission rate (per 100,000 people)*</td>
<td>Admission rate (per 100,000 people)*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All causes</td>
<td>21,836</td>
<td>11,466</td>
<td>14,140</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heart disease</td>
<td>2,888</td>
<td>1,640</td>
<td>1,744</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accidents and injuries</td>
<td>1,985</td>
<td>1,061</td>
<td>1,209</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cancer</td>
<td>952</td>
<td>532</td>
<td>654</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mental Illness</td>
<td>713</td>
<td>348</td>
<td>671</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stroke</td>
<td>652</td>
<td>376</td>
<td>379</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pneumonia and influenza</td>
<td>537</td>
<td>306</td>
<td>433</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diabetes</td>
<td>519</td>
<td>281</td>
<td>328</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drug-related</td>
<td>495</td>
<td>232</td>
<td>492</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alcohol-related</td>
<td>491</td>
<td>237</td>
<td>387</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asthma</td>
<td>275</td>
<td>142</td>
<td>262</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Age-adjusted

Mental illness

Depression is a common and serious health problem that often goes undiagnosed but is treatable. Other treatable mental health problems, such as anxiety, affect many New Yorkers. The high number of hospitalizations for mental illness among Southwest Queens residents is one indication of the burden of mental illness there. In addition, in a recent telephone survey, 9% of adults in Southwest Queens — corresponding to about 18,000 people — reported experiencing serious emotional distress.

Thousands of adults in Southwest Queens report serious emotional distress
While the number of AIDS deaths has dropped dramatically across New York City over the past decade, HIV/AIDS remains a very serious public health problem. Hundreds of Southwest Queens residents are living with HIV/AIDS.

HIV/AIDS in Southwest Queens, 2001

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Number of people newly diagnosed with HIV</th>
<th>Number of people living with HIV/AIDS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>88</td>
<td>894</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The health of mothers and children is an important measure of the overall health of a community. Ensuring that children get a healthy start and learn healthy behaviors has many long-term benefits.

Maternal and infant health

Three important measures of maternal and infant health are:

1. Early prenatal care (care initiated in the first trimester)
2. Low birthweight, which increases the risk for many health problems
3. Infant mortality (deaths of babies under one year of age)

Southwest Queens is near the citywide average for all these indicators, but has not yet reached national goals.
Children’s health

Asthma
Asthma affects a large number of New York City’s children and is a leading cause of missed school days and hospitalizations. There were 303 asthma hospitalizations among children in Southwest Queens in 2001.

Injuries
Injury is a preventable threat to children’s health. In 2001, 252 children in Southwest Queens were hospitalized with injuries, including those from falls, burns, and motor-vehicle crashes.

Lead poisoning
Lead can cause neurologic, learning, and behavioral problems, and lowered intelligence. While the number of lead-poisoned children in New York City has decreased over the past decade, the goal is to eliminate lead poisoning by preventing children’s exposure to lead paint and other sources of lead. There were 198 children newly diagnosed with lead poisoning in Southwest Queens in 2001 (defined as blood levels over 10 µg/dL).
Promoting healthy behaviors and reducing risks

Smoking
Smoking causes heart disease, stroke, emphysema, lung cancer, and many other illnesses. Currently, about one quarter of adults in Southwest Queens smoke. Most, however, want to quit, and more than half tried last year. There are a number of highly effective strategies, including medication (such as the nicotine patch) and counseling, to help smokers quit.

Stopping smoking is the most important thing smokers can do to improve their health.

Exercise, obesity, and diabetes
As New Yorkers exercise less and eat more, we are becoming more overweight. Being overweight puts people at risk for heart disease and many other health problems, especially diabetes. Diabetes is a chronic illness that can lead to heart attack, blindness, kidney failure, and amputations. Many New Yorkers are not getting enough exercise and are obese.* Even modest increases in exercise and reductions in weight can reduce the risk of diabetes by more than half.

Nearly 1 in 3 adults in Southwest Queens gets no physical activity and 1 in 5 is obese

* The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommends that adults get either moderate exercise for at least 30 minutes, 5 or more times per week, or vigorous exercise for at least 20 minutes, 3 or more times per week. Obesity is defined by someone’s “weight for height” — otherwise known as the “body mass index” or BMI — being over 30. “Overweight” is defined by a BMI over 25. Everyone should aim for a BMI less than 25. For example, a 5’10” man who weighs less than 175 lbs and a 5’4” woman who weighs less than 145 lbs have BMIs less than 25. To calculate BMI, visit www.cdc.gov/nccdphp/dnpa/bmi/bmi-adult.htm.
**Alcohol**

Heavy drinking is responsible for a large number of preventable deaths and disabilities, including those caused by motor-vehicle crashes and other accidents, liver disease, and cancer. One pattern of alcohol misuse that can lead to violence and health problems is "binge" drinking (consuming 5 or more drinks on one occasion).

![Graph showing thousands of adults in Southwest Queens binge drink at least once a month](image)

**Risk behaviors for HIV**

Many adults in Southwest Queens report at least one of the following behaviors that put them at risk for HIV: using injection drugs, having unprotected anal intercourse, exchanging sex or drugs for money, or having a sexually transmitted disease.

![Graph showing many adults in Southwest Queens are at high risk for HIV infection](image)
Medical Care

Opportunities for prevention
The medical community — doctors, nurses, counselors, and others — can help prevent illness. Screening and treatment for high blood pressure, high cholesterol, and cancer can prolong life. Flu and pneumonia vaccinations prevent many hospitalizations and deaths. Counseling to quit smoking or control drinking is highly effective and helps people who want to improve their health.

Access to care
Preventing and treating illness depends on people’s ability to access high-quality medical care. This means having health insurance and a “medical home” — a personal doctor or nurse practitioner. Many Southwest Queens residents have poor access to medical care: about 33,000 people report no current health care coverage; 19,000 people did not get needed medical care in the past year; and 46,000 people do not have a personal doctor.

Cancer screening and other preventive services
Cancer screening and other clinical services can prevent or reduce the severity of many illnesses. This graph shows how rates in Southwest Queens compare to New York City as a whole and to some national goals.
People’s ability to increase healthy behaviors and improve their health is influenced by the conditions in which they live. A healthy environment that includes adequate housing, neighborhood resources such as supermarkets and parks, community services such as daycare, and safety, is essential in preventing disease and promoting health. The graph below gives an indication of the vulnerability of many Southwest Queens residents, reflected in high rates of not graduating from high school, living in poverty, and feeling unsafe in their neighborhood.

Vulnerable Populations

Vulnerability of the neighborhood — education, poverty, and safety

Technical notes

Data sources

How the report card was calculated
Ranks in each category were computed by combining several standardized (z-scores) measures within the following categories: General health: Self-reported health status and all-cause mortality rate; Maternal and child health: All “Health of Mothers and Children” indices; Infectious disease: People living with HIV, pneumonia and influenza mortality, tuberculosis incidence, and gonorrhea incidence; Chronic diseases: Mortality and hospital admissions for heart disease, cancer, diabetes, and lung disease; Prevention in doctors’ offices: All listed indices; Access to medical care: All listed indices.

All rates are age-standardized to the NCHS Year 2000 standard. Mortality rates do not include residents of NYC who died outside the city. Infant mortality rates are 3-year averages, 1999-2001. Death rates are rounded to the nearest whole number; however, percentage differences between neighborhood and NYC rates are calculated based on more precise values.

Geographic definitions of neighborhoods are based on zip code aggregations (from the United Hospital Fund, New York, NY).

For more information on data collection and analysis, including detailed tables, please visit www.nyc.gov/health.

Cover Photograph: 120th Street, Richmond Hill, Queens. Photo by Don Weiss.
Reports on 41 other New York City neighborhoods are available from the New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene

by visiting: nyc.gov/health

by e-mailing: profiles@health.nyc.gov

or by writing to:
Community Health Profiles
New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene
Division of Epidemiology
125 Worth Street, Room 315, CN-6
New York, NY 10013

For more information about the health issues covered in this report, please call 311.