Heart disease leading cause of death in Lafayette
Stats: Cancer tops mortality list among black men

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LAFAYETTE — The leading cause of death in Lafayette Parish is heart disease, while cancer continues to be the leading cause of death among black men in the area.

Health information ranging from rates of infectious disease to family health statistics from the state Office of Public Health were released this week in the Louisiana Parish Health Profiles. The profiles contain information for the 64 parishes in the state.

Heart disease continues to be the leading cause of death for white and black women, according to the Lafayette Parish health profile.

“I have a history in my family of heart disease, and so does my wife,” said Larry Richard, regional administrator based in Lafayette for the Office of Public Health. “I am aware of this and I know I don’t always eat right. ... I am focusing on things I can do as an individual that will prevent me from having a heart attack or a stroke.”

By using the information in the profiles, Richard said, residents can address concerns with their doctors and become aware of possible problems.

“Of the things we need to do as a community and a society is to address the root causes,” Richard said.

Heart disease was responsible for an average of 126.2 deaths per 100,000 white men from 1988 to 1997. About 38.9 black men died from heart disease, while 132.8 white women died from it and 39.1 black women reportedly died of heart-related complications.

Smoking, obesity and lack of exercise were listed as factors in the rates of heart attack or strokes in the area.

Also, birth rates for the state and Lafayette Parish continue to top the national average.

In Lafayette, the teen birth rate in 1997 was 53.3 compared to 66.6 in Louisiana and 52.9 throughout the United States.

In Lafayette Parish, 14 percent of live births were to women 19 or younger, according to the health profile.

Prenatal care — medical care within the first three months of pregnancy with regular visits thereafter — was listed as a major health concern for the area.

“The information gives them a way to start asking questions to their doctors,” said Dr. Tina Stefanski with the Office of Public Health in Lafayette. “It gives them incentive to do regular check-ups and discuss these kind of things.”

The birth rate in Louisiana was 15.2 per 1,000 in 1997, and in Lafayette Parish it was 15.8 per 1,000 births. The birth rate in the United States was 14.6 live births per 1,000 women in 1997.

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Disease

In Louisiana, 81 percent of babies born are to women who received prenatal care in the first three months, according to the health profile.

In Lafayette Parish, 86.6 percent of women had prenatal care during the first three months.

“It is not because the care is not available,” Richard said. “We do provide prenatal care to low-risk maternity patients.”

Despite a steady increase in prenatal care around the state, black women continue to receive less care than white women, according to the state health profile.

Lack of prenatal care can result in low birth weight babies, which is considered to be 5 pounds, 8 ounces or less.

The lower the birth weight, the greater the chance of death within the first year, and costs the state thousands in medical care.

In Lafayette in 1997, 9.2 percent of babies born were low birth weight, compared to 10.2 percent in Louisiana and 7.5 nationally, according to the health profile.

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