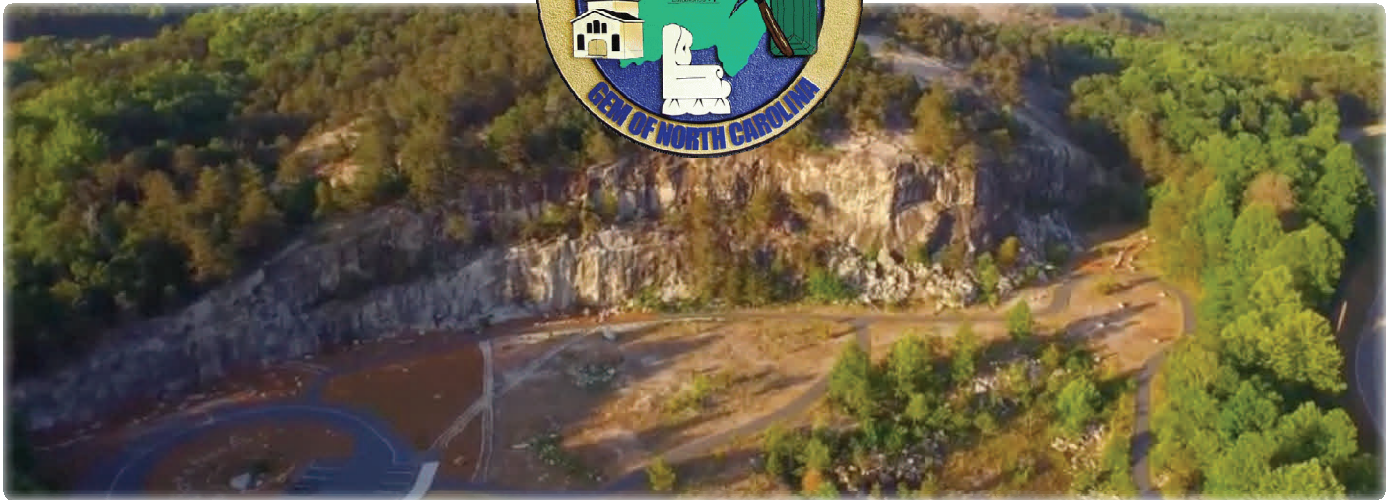
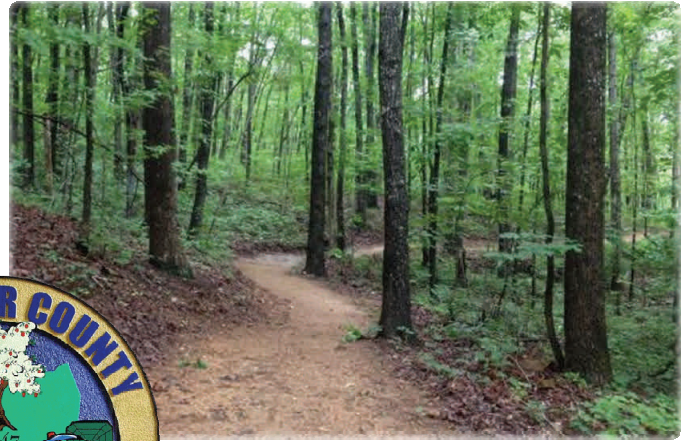


2015 State of the County Health Report





About this report

The Alexander County Health Department is pleased to present the 2015 State of the County Health (SOTCH) Report. As part of the North Carolina's local health department accreditation process and consolidated contract, the Alexander County Health Department is required to submit a comprehensive Community Health Assessment (CHA) every four years. During the years between health assessments, a State of the County Health Report is issued. The SOTCH Report is an abbreviated version of the larger health assessment and is intended to provide a quick overview of the health of Alexander County. Demographic information precedes the health data and information in the report is used to provide background information on the Alexander County region.

This report includes updated information on health priorities that were identified in the 2014 Community Health Assessment. These areas include substance abuse, mental health, and healthy families. In addition, emerging issues and new initiatives are discussed.

This information is designed to educate and update community members, community leaders, agencies, organizations and others on progress in addressing certain health issues. This update is also intended to influence the development of new policies that affect the health of the community, guide the planning of health programs and recruit interested community members to participate in future activities.

The reports are made available to the public on our website: www.alexanderhealth.org.

Sincerely,

Leeanne Whisnant

Leeanne Whisnant, MS, BSN, RN
Health Director
Alexander County Health Department



Above: The Hiddenite Festival Road Race, one of several road races held in Alexander County, offers residents and visitors the opportunity to compete in runs of 5K, 10K, or half marathon distances.

Cover: Rocky Face Mountain Recreation Area in Hiddenite offers residents opportunities for hiking, camping, picnicking, rock climbing, and offers educational opportunities so visitors can learn more about its unique plant and animal life.



Overview of Alexander County

Community Overview

Located in the foothills region of western North Carolina, Alexander County is comprised of 263 square miles, two-thirds of which is covered in farmland, with an average farm size of 90 acres producing commodities such as poultry, dairy, tobacco, apples, forestry products, grain crops, and beef cattle. Other primary industries include furniture, textiles, education, health services, professional, business services, trade, transportation and utilities.

Alexander County offers a variety of outdoor attractions for citizens and visitors to enjoy, whether it's hiking or rock climbing at Rocky Face Mountain Recreational Area, gem mining, swimming, running in one of the county's numerous road race events, boating or fishing on Lake Hickory, or riding your ATV at one of the county's all terrain parks. Alexander County strives to offer its citizens and visitors with numerous opportunities to remain active and fit.



Population

The total estimated population for Alexander County in 2014 was 37,392, which is a 0.5% increase from the recorded population of 37,198 in the 2010 Census.

Data Source: U.S. Census Bureau

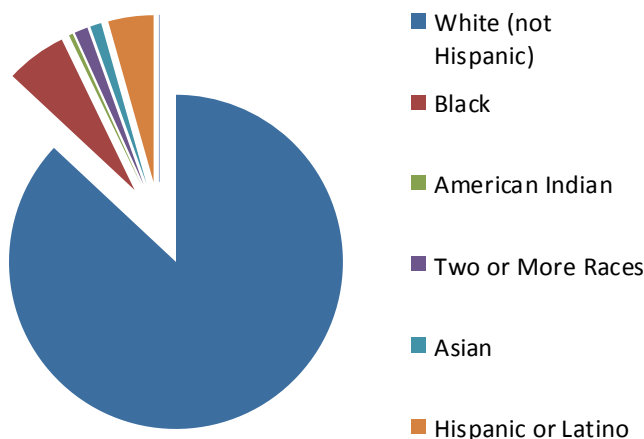
Educational Obtainment

In Alexander County, 79.3% of the population has obtained a high school diploma or equivalent, and 11.7% hold a bachelor's degree or higher. Both figures are lower than the state average of 84.9%, and 27.3% respectively.

Data Source: U.S. Census Bureau

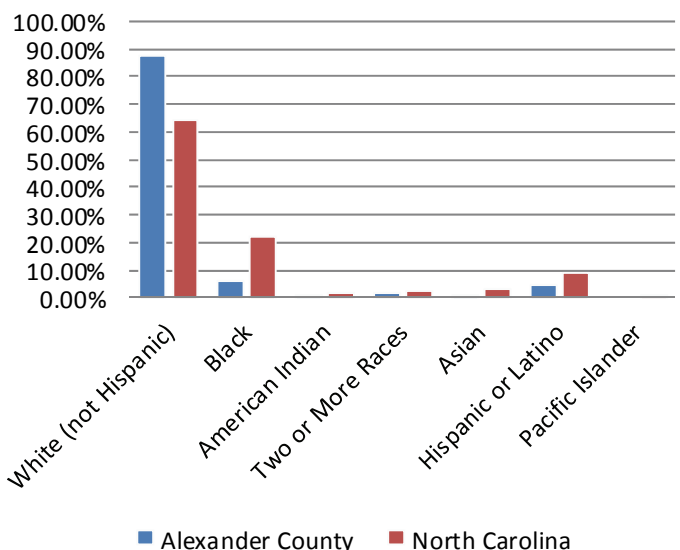
Demographics

Distribution of Race Alexander County



Source: US Census Bureau

Distribution of Race

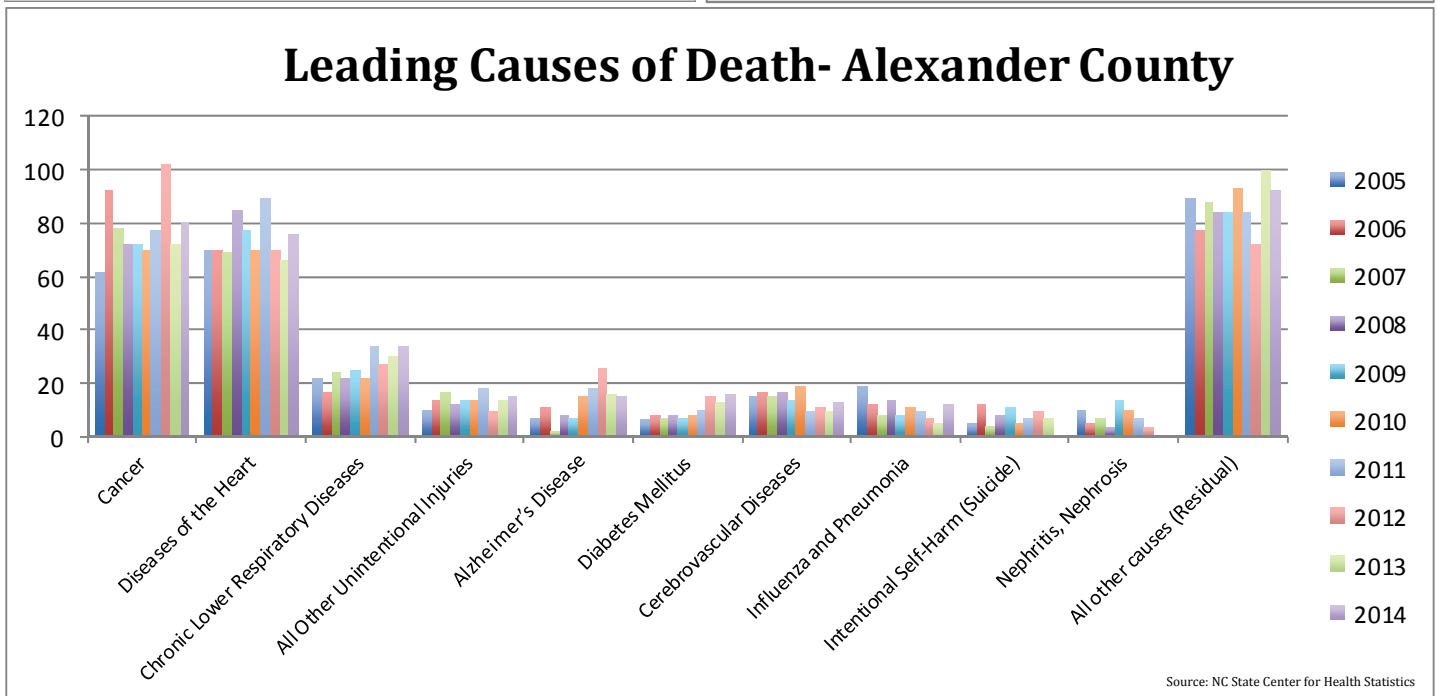
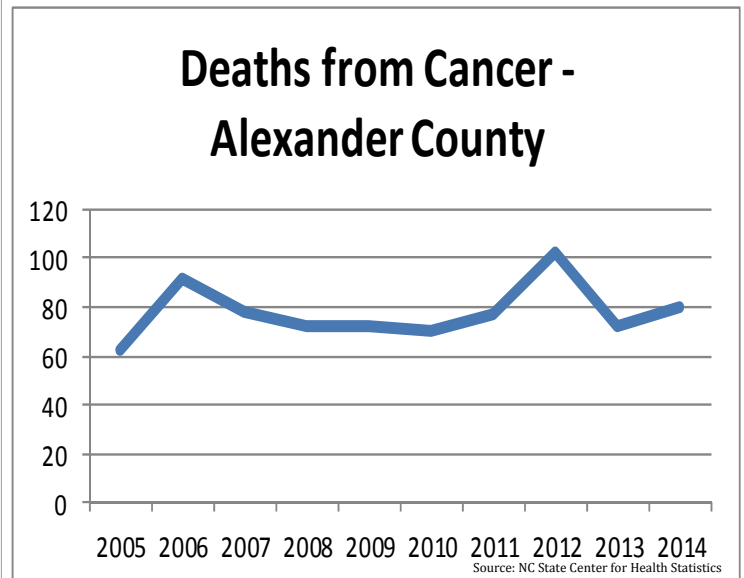
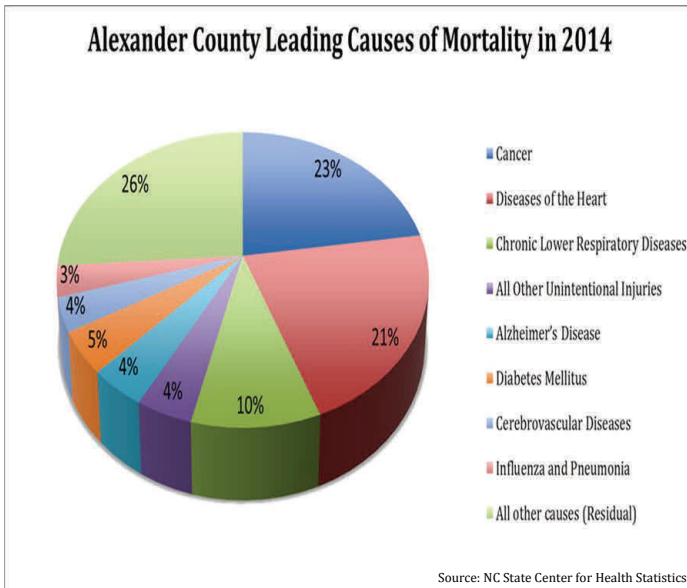


Source: US Census Bureau



Leading Causes of Death

Cancer once again was the leading cause of death in Alexander County for 2014, closely followed by diseases of the heart. Chronic lower respiratory diseases ranked as the third most prevalent cause of death in 2014. These diseases and illnesses also made up the top three causes of death in 2013 with all three slightly increasing in frequency from the previous year.



The graph above shows the leading causes of death in Alexander County for the past ten years. Cancer became the leading cause of death in 2011 and has retained the top ranking continually since then. The Health Department and community partners continue to work to address this issue. In 2015, the incidents of cancer, diseases of the heart, chronic lower respiratory disease, Diabetes Mellitus, Cerebrovascular Diseases, Influenza and Pneumonia increased while Alzheimer's Disease decreased slightly. Data for intentional self harm and Nephritis were not included in the top mortality data for 2014.



2015 Progress Toward Priorities

Healthy Families—Nutrition

The Alexander County Health Department has partnered with the Alexander County Partnership for Children and a number of local childcare facilities to increase enhanced nutritional opportunities to young children within our community. Lulu's Child Enrichment Center at Mitchell Gold + Bob Williams, a Shape NC Demonstration Site, has increased access to fresh fruits and vegetables through the use of raised bed gardens installed at the facility. The gardens allow children to learn the benefits of eating healthy, and excess produce from the garden is utilized in the manufacturing facility's café to provide healthy lunch options for staff. Mitchell Gold + Bob Williams has been dedicated to increasing healthy options for meals and snacks available for workers at their Taylorsville facility.



Overall, fifty percent of the childcare facilities located within Alexander County now have raised bed vegetable gardens at their centers, expanding educational opportunities and access to fresh food options for these children. Additionally, nearly half of the facilities are also participating in a Community Supported Agriculture program with The Farmer's Daughter to source locally grown fruits and vegetables for consumption by the children at their child care center. Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) is a production and marketing model whereby consumers buy shares of a farm's harvest in advance. Consumers become CSA members by paying an agreed amount at the beginning of the growing season in exchange for a variety of

freshly picked vegetables every week throughout the growing season. The Health Department will continue to work with the local Nutrition Coalition and Physical Activity Committee to promote participation in these programs to enhance the eating habits of our young residents.



Speedway to Healthy—Photo source: The Taylorsville Times

In an effort to teach children about the importance of living a healthy lifestyle, the Alexander County Health Department partnered with the Alexander County Cooperative Extension, the Alexander County Partnership for Children, and North Carolina A&T State University to present Speedway to Healthy to preschool and elementary students in 2015. The Speedway to Healthy is a 1,200-square-foot, walk-through exhibit representing the human

body, and serves as a resource to fight childhood obesity and poor health among children in North Carolina.

In 2015, the Alexander County Farmer's Market was relocated to the parking lot of the old Alexander County Hospital on Highway 16 South in Taylorsville. This new location placed the Market on one of the busiest roadways in the County leading to better exposure for the Market to residents and visitors. The Market was also changed from Thursday afternoon to Saturday morning in an effort to better meet the needs of working citizens. The Alexander County Health Department partnered with the Alexander County Cooperative Extension to advertise these changes and work to increase community utilization of the Market. Eating well is an



Alexander County Farmer's Market

important part of improving your health and reducing your cancer risk. Increasing access to healthy food for our citizens remains a priority for the Health Department and our community partners.



2015 Progress Toward Priorities

Mental Health



Mental Health continues to be a complex and difficult issue to address in Alexander County. Health Department leadership and Alexander County Television Network staff worked with Dr. Craig Martin to create an informational video in 2015 to educate the public on services provided by our local management entity/managed care organization, Smoky Mountain. A Comprehensive Care Center, RHA, is located in Taylorsville and provides mental health services to our citizens by appointment. Additionally, Alexander County residents in need of mental health, substance use, or intellectual/developmental disability services may also contact Smoky Mountain at 1-800-849-6127.

Substance Abuse—Narcan Program & Prescription Drug Take Back

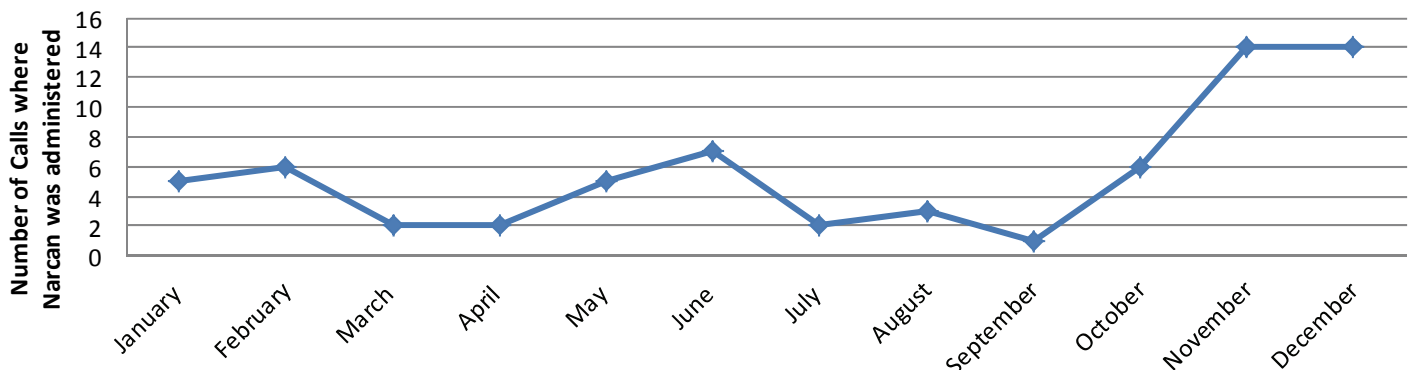
In conjunction with Alexander County EMS, the Alexander County Sheriff’s Office, and Project Lazarus, the Health Department continues to take steps to address the elevated prescription drug overdose rate in our community. In 2015, each first response agency in the County was given the opportunity to participate in a Narcan (Naloxone) program designed to increase survival rates for individuals suffering from opioid overdoses. Seven local fire departments accepted the invitation to participate and were trained and supplied with this life saving drug designed to block or reverses the effects of opioid medication including extreme drowsiness, slowed breathing, or loss of consciousness. Narcan was administered 67 times by Alexander County EMS in 2015 to a patient with an average age of 48.

The permanent prescription drug take-box located inside the Alexander County Law Enforcement Center continues to be an effective tool to safely dispose of unused, unwanted, or expired medications from homes throughout our community. In 2015, approximately 500 pounds of medication were collected in the box and destroyed in a safe and secure manner. Local agencies will continue to promote use of the program, and offer several take-back events throughout the community in 2016 in an effort to reduce incidences of opioid overdose in Alexander County.



Example of an intranasal Naloxone kit provided for first responder use

Narcan Administered by Alexander County EMS in 2015



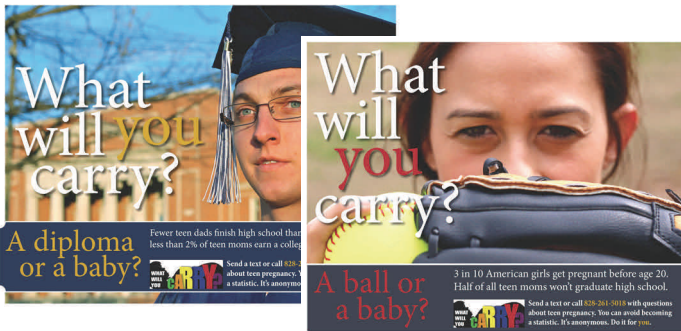
Source: Alexander County EMS



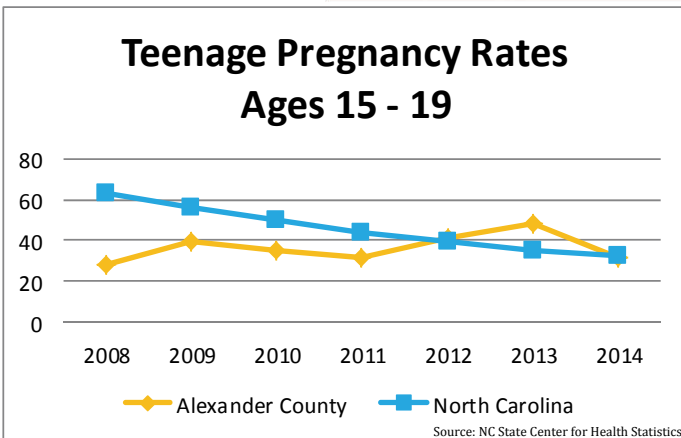
Emerging Issues

Teenage Pregnancy

Teenage pregnancy is a public health issue that affects not only the mother, but the community as a whole. The teenage pregnancy rate in Alexander County surpassed the state average in 2012 and continued its upward trend in 2013. In an attempt to reduce this rate locally, Health Department staff and volunteers worked this year to develop the “What Will You Carry” campaign to bring awareness to this emerging issue. Additionally, the Health Department conducted an informational campaign with partners at the School Health Advisory Council, Caring Hearts Pregnancy Center, and the Community Collaborative, participated in a social media campaign, and created a program in which teens could anonymously call or text a dedicated telephone number to ask questions and get advice from trained public health staff. Data for 2014 shows a significant reduction in the teenage pregnancy rate for Alexander County. Staff will continue to work with partner organizations to provide educational resources to continue this reduction in future years.



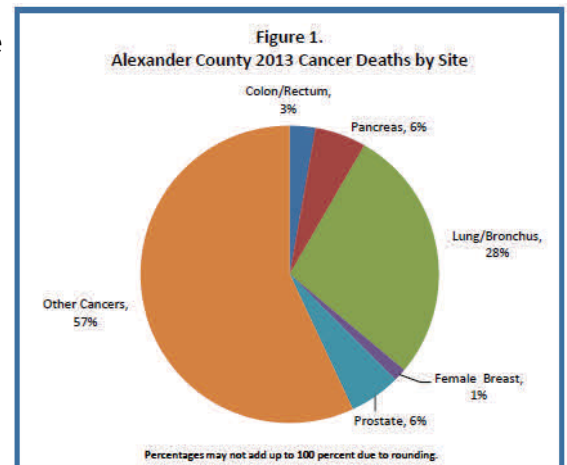
| Alexander County 2014 Teen Pregnancies | |
|--|---------|
| Number of pregnancies among 15-19-year-old girls: | 32 |
| Teen pregnancy rate per 1,000 15-19-year-old girls: | 31.2 |
| Teen pregnancy rates by race/ethnicity | |
| African American: | * |
| Hispanic: | * |
| White: | 30.1 |
| Teen pregnancy rates by age | |
| 15-17-year-olds: | * |
| 18-19-year-olds: | 67.3 |
| Number of pregnancies among 15-17-year-old girls: | 9 |
| Number of pregnancies among 18-19-year-old girls: | 23 |
| Percent of Repeat Pregnancies: | 15.60% |
| Teen birth rate per 1,000 15-19-year-old girls: | 29.2 |
| NC County Ranking (out of 100 counties): | 53 |
| Change since 2013: | -35.40% |
| *Rates based on small numbers (<20 pregnancies) are unstable and not provided. | |



Cancer

Cancer once again is the leading cause of death in Alexander County for 2014. Cancer is a group of more than 100 different diseases, all of which are characterized by uncontrolled growth and spread of abnormal cells. Cancer risk increases with age, and varies by gender and race. As the average age of the population increases, the incidence of cancer are predicted to increase as well. In 2014, cancer was the leading cause of death statewide in North Carolina. The majority of cancer deaths occur at five sites: colon/rectum, pancreas, lung/bronchus, female breast and prostate (Figure 1).

Through our Healthy Families initiative, the Health Department works to reduce cancer risk factors including promoting programs aimed at preventing tobacco use, promoting physical activity programs including 123 GO Play AC, offering prevention opportunities such as the Human Papillomavirus (HPV) vaccine, and offering and promoting cancer screening activities.



Source: NC Central Cancer Registry

Acknowledgements

The Alexander County Health Department's mission is to achieve a healthy community by protecting and promoting Public Health through education, training and promotion of health services and advocacy. If you have questions regarding information provided in the report, our services, or comments on how we can better serve our community, please contact us at 828-632-9704.

This report is available to the public at the Alexander County Health Department located at 338 1st Avenue South West in Taylorsville, at the Alexander County Administration Office located at 621 Liledoun Road in Taylorsville, and on our website at AlexanderHealth.org.

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