

THE COMMUNITY AND THE ENVIRONMENT



Our health is shaped by the communities and the environments in which we live. These include our schools, workplaces, and neighborhoods. If these environments are created to preserve our health through clean air, safe neighborhoods, fresh food availability, local park and green space access, and good schools, it can be easier for us to eat well, exercise and promote healthy living. In this section, we present two aspects of our community and our environment that impact our health: violence and the built environment.

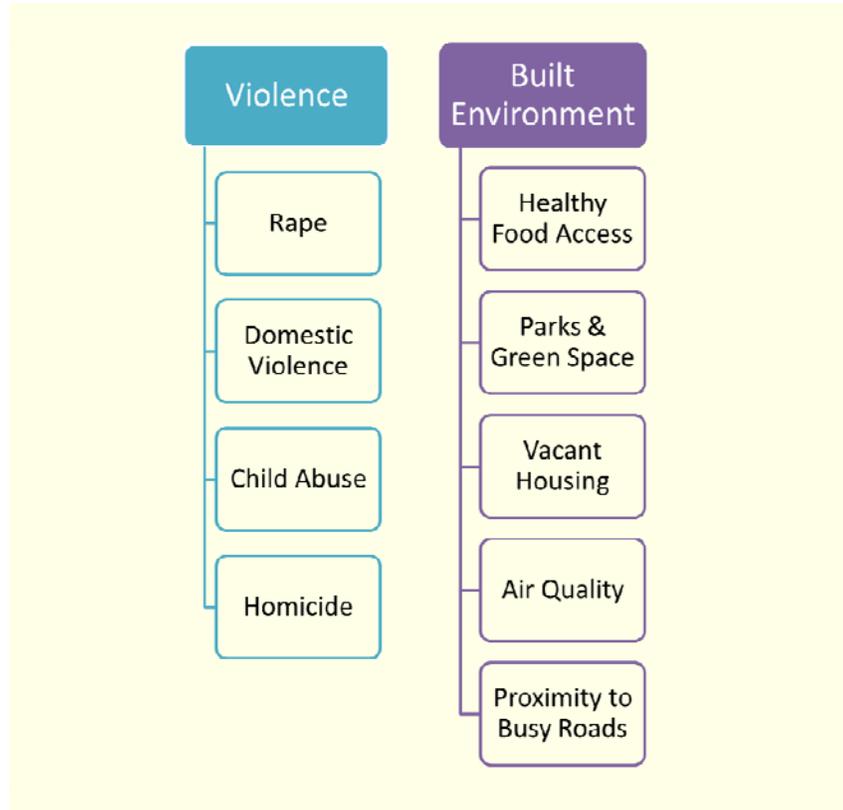
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OVERVIEW

Our health is shaped by the communities and the environments in which we live—our schools, workplaces, and neighborhoods. When these environments are health enhancing and we have clean air to breathe, safe neighborhoods, fresh food, local parks, and good schools, it is easier to exercise, eat well, and feel good.

Our physical environment can be a determinant of overall health. This includes the safety of not only our home and home community but our workplaces, and the attributes of the neighborhoods in which we live, learn, work, play, worship and age. Safe and affordable housing, access and availability to healthy foods, public safety and environments free from toxins can enhance quality of life and influence the health outcomes of the population.¹

In this section, we consider two aspects of health in our community and our environment: violence and the built environment.



VIOLENCE

Rape, domestic violence, child abuse, and homicide can cause injury and harm in our homes and communities. Violence erodes communities by reducing social cohesion, decreasing property values, and disrupting social services.² Furthermore, fear of crime is associated with poorer mental health, reduced physical functioning and lower quality of life. Fearful people exercise less, see friends less often, and participate in fewer social activities compared to those less fearful.³ Violence is a serious public health problem in the U.S. The number of violent deaths tells only part of the story. Those who survive violence are left with permanent physical and emotional scars.

BUILT ENVIRONMENT

In communities designed to promote healthy behaviors, it is easier for residents to stay physically active and age in place, avoid injuries and breathe better quality air. An attractive, mixed land-use community design promotes walking and biking by decreasing distances between homes, businesses, schools and places used for recreational activity. It also increases positive community interaction, street safety, and overall quality of life. Measures for healthy infrastructure include bike and pedestrian infrastructure, access to public park facilities, access to healthy foods such as fresh fruits and vegetables, and air quality.

- Violence erodes communities by reducing social cohesion, decreasing property values, disrupting social services and increasing fear.
- Communities designed to promote healthy lifestyles increase positive community interaction, street safety and overall quality of life.

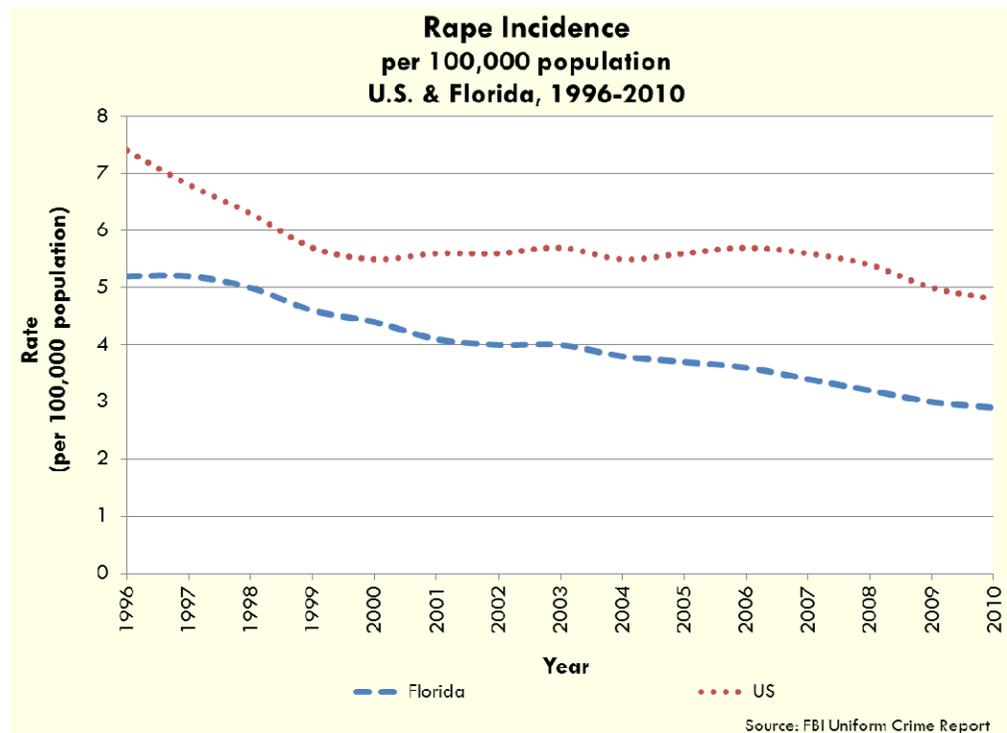
VIOLENCE

- FBI statistics indicate that the incidence of rape is on the decline in Florida.
- In 2008, Florida had the 23rd highest reported rape rate in the nation.

Violence has direct and indirect effects on health. Rape, domestic violence, and child abuse have direct physical adverse consequences and indirect consequences of victimization, isolation, and fear that persists over time.

RAPE

Although there is general consensus that rape is underreported nationwide and that the number of rapes is therefore much larger than the data show, FBI statistics indicate that the incidence of rape is on the decline in Florida, decreasing from 5.2 per 100,000 population in 1996 to 2.9 in 2010. In 2008, Florida had the 23rd highest rate of reported rape in the nation, at 2.9 per 100,000 population.



VIOLENCE

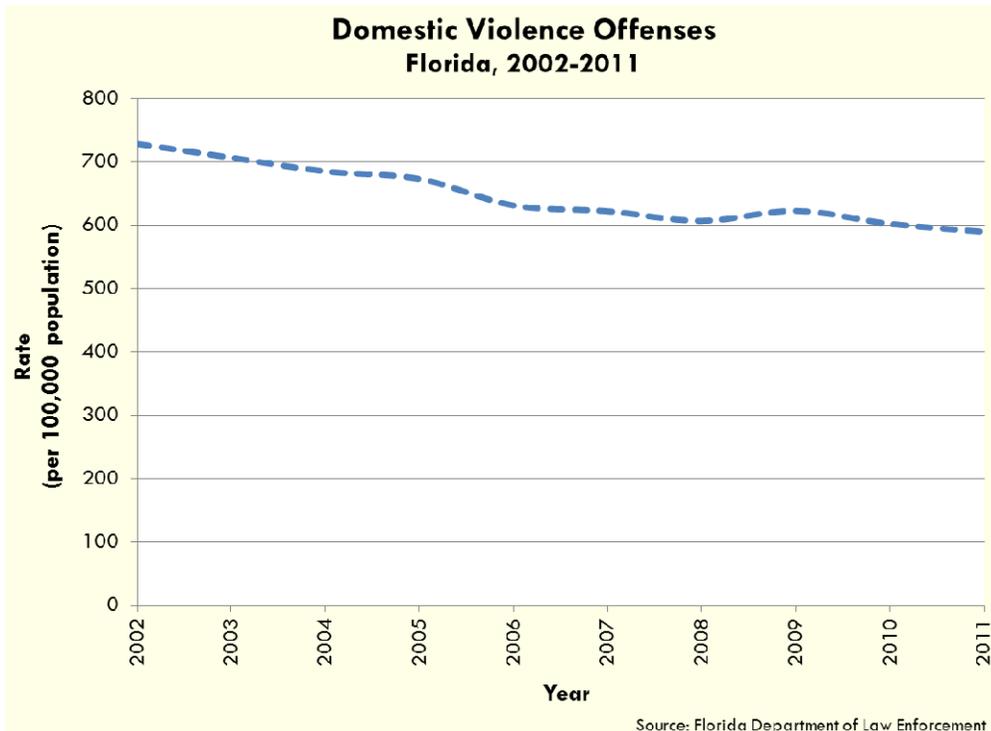
DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

Violence against children and domestic violence are major markers of societal instability.

Like rape, domestic violence and child abuse statistics tend to be underreported and the effects of those behaviors continue after the overt incidents are over. Domestic violence can have long-lasting psychosocial impacts, and domestic violence against pregnant women can lead to premature births. Parents who physically abuse their spouses are more likely than others to physically abuse their children.⁴ Substance abuse can be a major contributing factor to both child abuse and domestic violence. Unemployment and financial difficulties are also associated with increased rates of child abuse and domestic violence. Domestic violence rates had been declining since 1997, but have leveled off more recently. In 2011, there were 590 offenses per 100,000 population in Florida.

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VIOLENCE

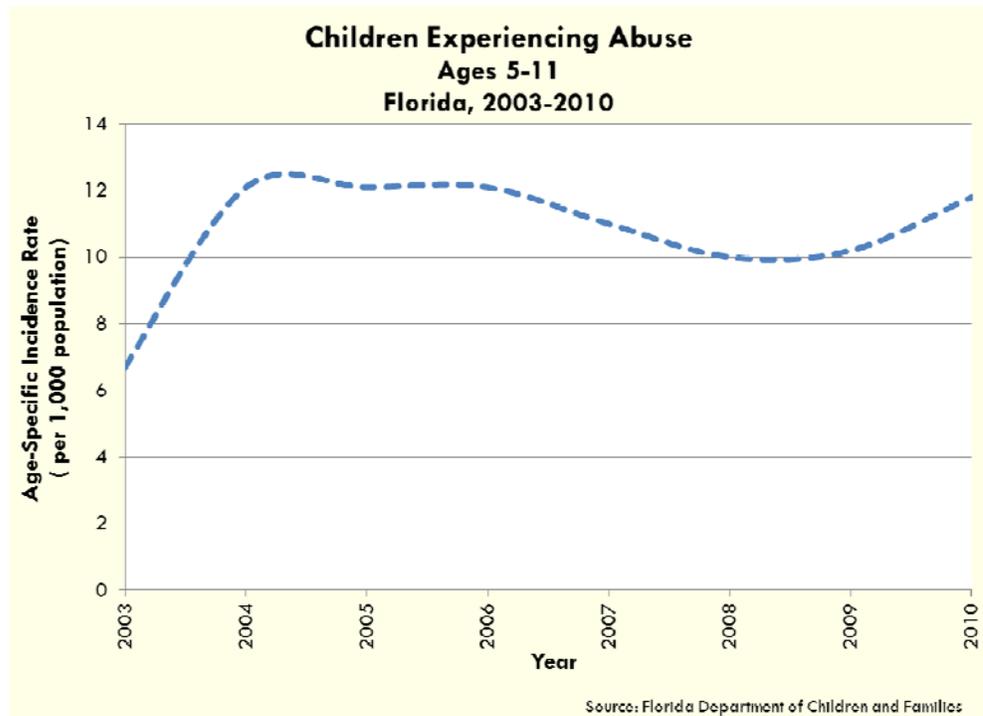
- Children under one year old had the highest rate of victimization.
- More than 30% of child fatalities were attributed exclusively to neglect.

CHILD ABUSE

In 2010, national child protective organizations received over 3.3 million reports of alleged maltreatment involving approximately 5.9 million children. Children under one year of age had the highest rate of victimization at 20.6 per 1,000 children. The overall rate of child fatalities was 2.07 deaths per 100,000 children. More than 30 percent (32.6%) of child fatalities were attributed exclusively to neglect, and more than 40 percent (40.8%) of child fatalities were caused by multiple maltreatment types.⁵

Child abuse and neglect can result in death, disability, poor school performance, teen pregnancy as well as mental and emotional disorders. Child abuse is a risk factor for violent behavior in adolescents and adult criminality. In adulthood, victims of childhood abuse and neglect are more likely to experience drug use, hypertension, depression and a shortened lifespan. Primary, secondary and tertiary prevention programs can improve opportunities for children to be raised in healthy, safe, stable and nurturing family environments, yet Florida’s rate of child abuse among children between 5 and 11 years old has increased from 6.7 per 1,000 children in 2003 to 11.8 in 2010.

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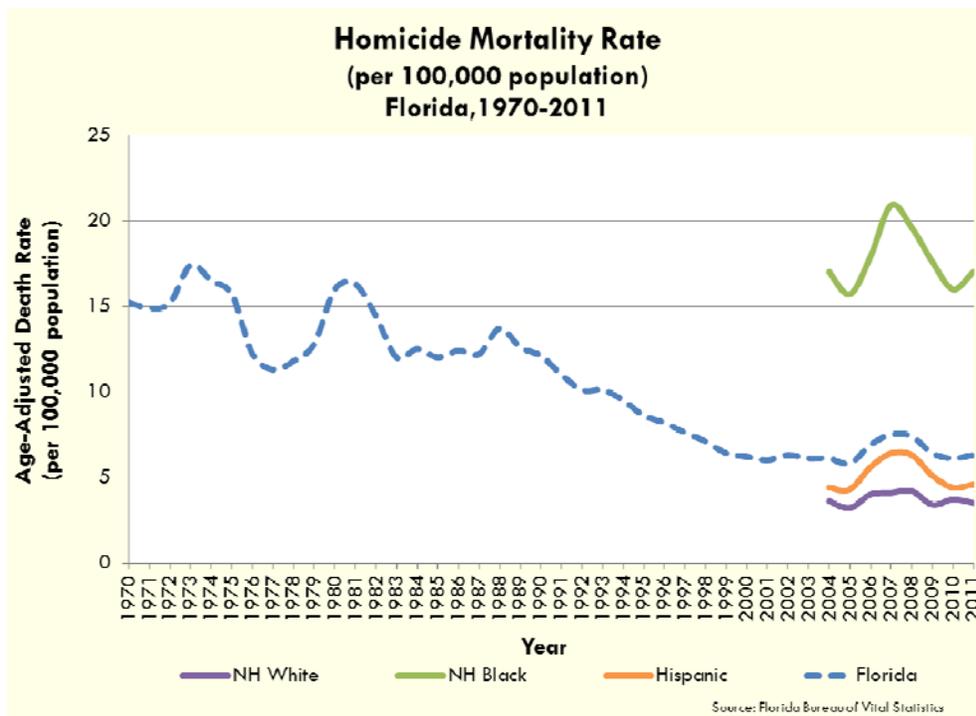
VIOLENCE

HOMICIDE

Nationally, homicide is the second leading cause of death for people between 15 and 24 and the third leading cause of death for people between 10 and 14 and 25 and 34. Homicide rates are consistently highest among non-Hispanic blacks, and the overall rate for males is about four times that of females.⁶

In Florida, age-adjusted homicide rates for non-Hispanic blacks is 17.0 per 100,000 population while the rate for non-Hispanic whites is 3.5 per 100,000 population. Non-Hispanic black Floridians are 4.9 times more likely to die from homicide than non-Hispanic white Floridians. Homicide is among the ten leading causes of death for non-Hispanic black Floridians.

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- Non-Hispanic blacks in Florida are 4.9 times more likely than non-Hispanic whites in Florida to die from homicide.



BUILT ENVIRONMENT

- The design of a community can impact mental, physical and economic health of that community.
- Only 32.3% of Floridians live within a half-mile of a healthy food source.

In Florida, public health officials have been working to encourage healthy infrastructure by creating a relationship between county health departments and regional and local planning departments.

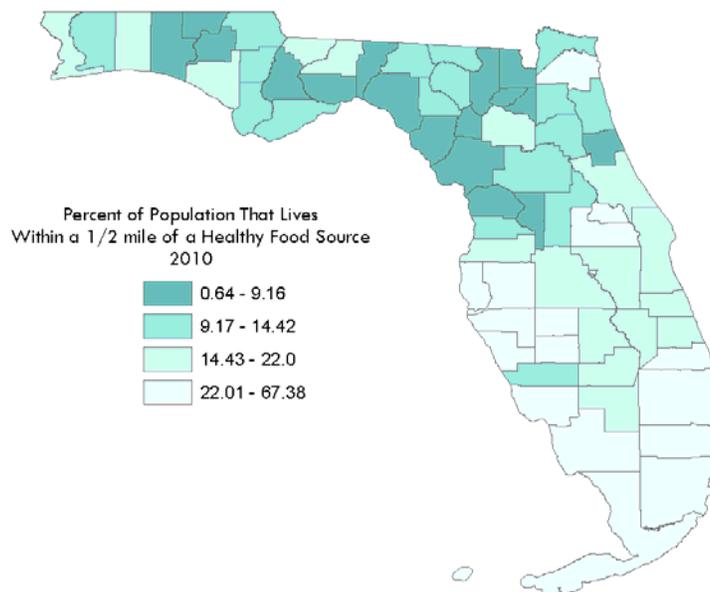
Communities designed to promote healthy behaviors, provide residents opportunities to stay physically active and age in place; lowers the risk of injuries, and have better air quality. The design of Florida's communities also impacts the population's mental and economic health. An attractive, mixed land-use community design promotes walking and biking by decreasing distances between homes, businesses, schools and places used for recreational activity. It also increases positive community interaction, street safety and decreases crime.

Recently, the link between built environment and health has become more clear, and the CDC encourages states to become more proactive in their planning processes. In Florida, public health officials have been working to encourage healthy infrastructure by creating a relationship between county health departments and local planning departments. This partnership will help design new developments, change planning policies and increase awareness of connections between health and the built environment.

Measures for healthy infrastructure include access to healthy foods, availability of public parks and green space, percentage of vacant housing and overall air quality.

HEALTHY FOODS

Because healthy food environments are difficult to assess, many different methods have been used. One effective measure used in Florida is the percent of the population that live within a ten-minute walk (1/2 mile) of a healthy food source. These healthy food sources include grocery stores, supermarkets and produce stands that offer a wide selection of healthy options such as fresh fruits and vegetables. Overall, only 32.2% of Floridians live within 1/2 mile of a healthy food source, but 33.5% live within a 1/2 mile of a fast food restaurant.



Source: Florida Department of Health

BUILT ENVIRONMENT

PARKS & GREEN SPACE

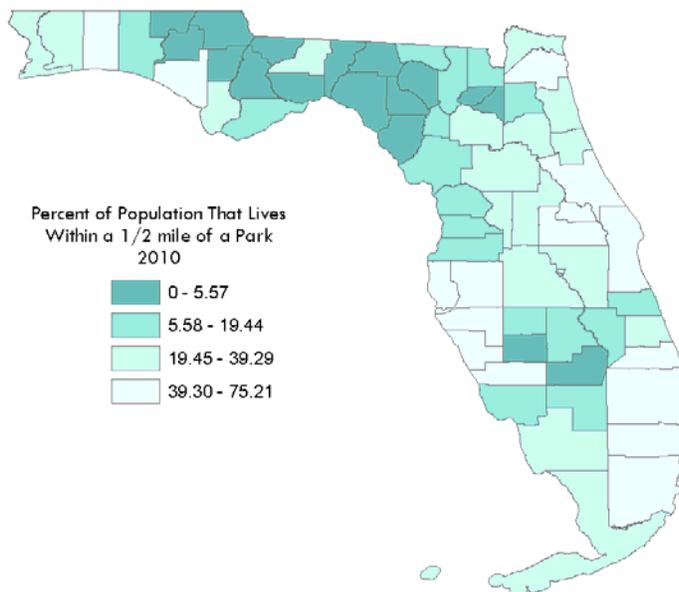
Public green space has a significant impact on a community’s health. Research has demonstrated that in Florida the “amount of green space within defined distances of all census tracts in a county had a significant association with both all-cause mortality and cardiovascular mortality” (Coutts, Horner and Chapin, 2010)⁷. Furthermore, there is a significant association between the amount of green space and how much people exercise. Researchers found that, “for every .004 square mile increase in green space (about two football fields), there was a 1% increase in the moderate and vigorous physical activity percent among the [county] population” (Coutts, Chapin, Horner and Taylor, 2013)⁸. Green space allows people to exercise and socialize, ultimately improving their health.

In addition to countless city and county parks, the state of Florida owns 594,879 acres of land designated for park usage. This includes 570 trails, 160 parks and 84 swimming areas maintained by the state’s parks and recreation departments. The availability of such recreational space encourages physical activity. Although there is no formal mechanism for counting the number of Floridians and visitors who use the parks, attendance figures are kept for those who stay overnight. This has fluctuated in the 20,000 range since 2006. Sensors are being installed in the Trails and Greenways parks to get a better idea of usage of these resources.

Although the usual measure of park access is through acres of park and recreation space, it does not provide clarity into their proximity to the population or their distribution. In Florida, 44.8% of the population lives within a 10-minute walk, or ½ mile of a park.

- Green space availability impacts mortality risk and physical health.
- 44.8% of Floridians live within a half-mile of a park.

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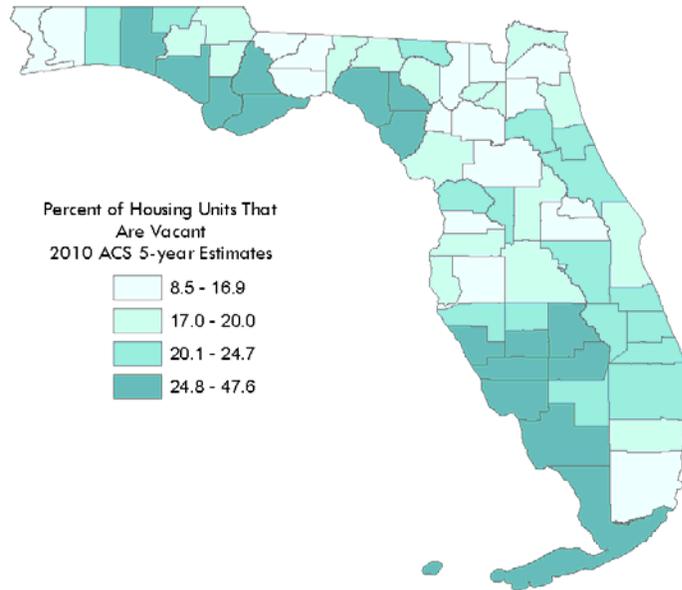
Source: Florida Department of Health

BUILT ENVIRONMENT

- 19.3% of Florida's houses were vacant according to 2010 ACS 5-year estimates.

HOUSING

As noted in the demographic and socio-economic section, Florida has 8.9 million housing units. However, 19.3% of those houses are estimated to be vacant.⁹ Dilapidated and unmaintained units are associated with increases in crime and blight in a neighborhood, and reduce the quality of life among the population that live there.¹⁰



Source: 2010 ACS 5-year Estimates
Table DP04

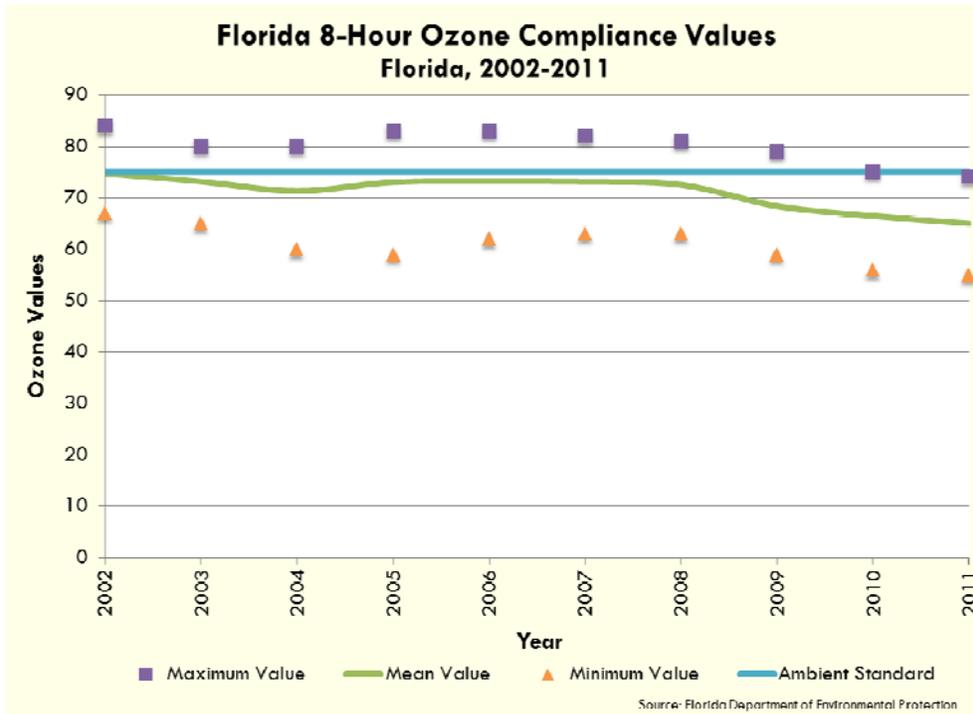
BUILT ENVIRONMENT

AIR QUALITY

As air quality decreases, a higher proportion of the population experiences increasingly severe adverse health effects such as chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, lung cancer deaths, and asthma attacks. In recent years, poor air quality has also been linked to cardiovascular problems. Air pollutants lead to high blood pressure, blood clotting and electrical instability in the heart, which can result in heart attack, stroke, and sudden cardiac death. Even short-term exposure can be hazardous. Research shows spikes in cardiac deaths, emergency room visits, and hospital admissions in the hours and days that follow a spike in cities' levels of particulate matter.^{11,12}

To address air quality issues, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency sets National Ambient Air Quality Standards (NAAQS) for six pollutants that affect the air.¹³ In Florida, the two most important pollutants are ozone and particle matter that is 2.5 micrometers in diameter or less (PM 2.5), because they affect so many people when present. Ozone, created through a complex chemical reaction, is the principal component of smog in urban environments and known to exacerbate asthma. The graph below depicts ozone annual values in Florida over the last ten years. Typically, ozone is measured in 8 hour periods due to the chemical interactions leading to the production of ozone in ambient air. Although Florida's mean values are below ambient values, the maximum values on occasion have exceeded the ambient values. In the last four years, however, there has been a decrease in ozone annual values.

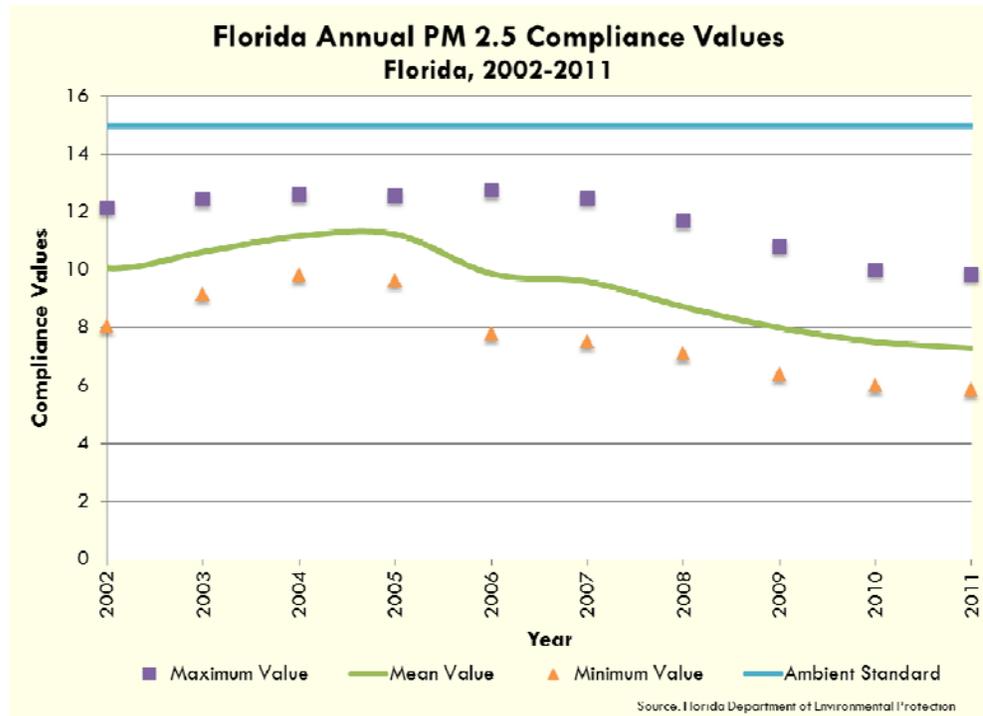
- Ozone and PM 2.5 can impact the health of those living with poor lung health and has been linked to cardiovascular problems.
- Ozone mean values have been very similar to the ambient standard, with maximum values exceeding the standard in previous years.
- Ozone values have been decreasing since 2008.



BUILT ENVIRONMENT

- All PM 2.5 values have been below the ambient standard for the last ten years.

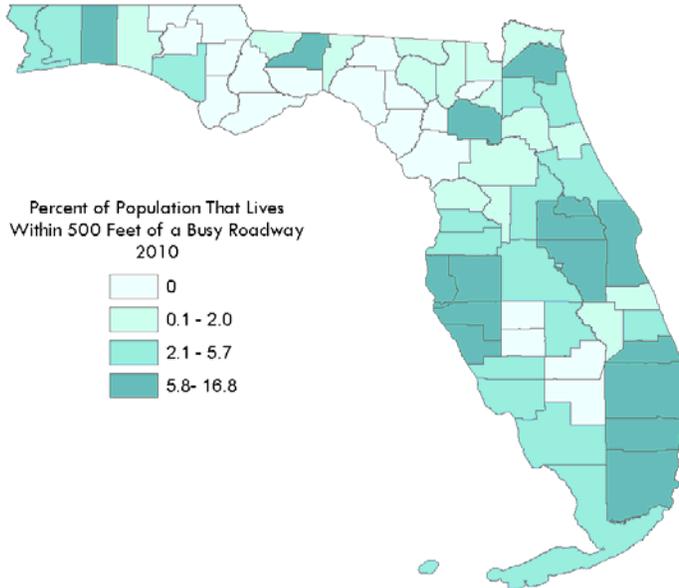
Particle matter that is 2.5 micrometers in diameter or less is known as PM 2.5. This matter is a mixture of solid particles and liquid droplets found in the air. It is usually found in smoke and haze and causes asthma exacerbation because the matter can be inhaled deeply into the lungs. Florida's mean and maximum values for PM 2.5 have been below the ambient standard.



BUSY ROADWAYS

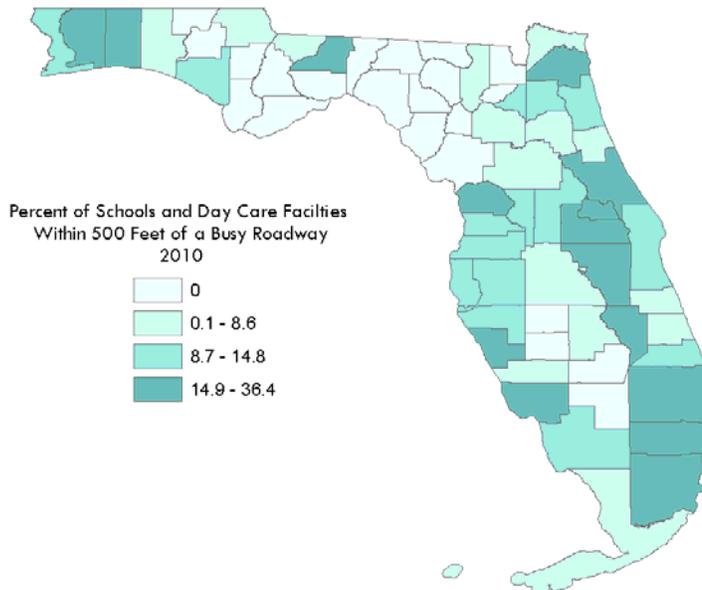
Another air quality measure is the distance the population is from busy roadways, such as interstates and highways, that expose people to respiratory irritants. In 2010, 8.7% of the population lived within 500 feet of a busy roadway and 19.2% of our schools and day care facilities were within 500 feet of a busy roadway in Florida.

BUILT ENVIRONMENT



Source: Florida Department of Health

Counties with the largest percent of the population living near busy roadways tend to be the same counties with high percentages of schools and day care facilities near busy roadways.



Source: Florida Department of Health

- In 2010, 8.7% of the population lived within 500 feet of a busy road and 19.2% of schools and day care facilities were within 500 feet of a busy roadway.
- The counties with high proportions of those living within 500 feet of a busy roadway often are the same counties that have a high percent of schools and day care centers within 500 feet of a busy roadway.

END NOTES

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