



Life Course Model

The Life Course Model views health as a product of risk factors, protective factors, and environmental agents that a person encounters throughout his or her life. All these things add up overtime and can impact our health over a lifetime and even the health of the next generation.

Key concepts of the Life Course Model

- ☐ **Timeline: Today’s experiences and exposures influence tomorrow’s health.**
- ☐ **Timing: Health status is mostly affected during critical or sensitive periods.** The preconception, pregnancy and early childhood life stages are critical periods with life-long impacts on health. The health of one generation directly affects the health status of the next one.
- ☐ **Environment: The community environment strongly affects the ability to be healthy.** Environment is defined to include not only physical factors such as safe housing, availability of nutritious foods, but also social and economic factors such as racism and the poverty status of families.
- ☐ **Equity: Inequality in health reflects more than genetics and personal choice.** Differences in life situations of population groups lead to differences in health.
- ☐ **Protective and Risk Factors: The interaction of risk and protective factors influence health.** Exposure to protective and risk factors throughout life have a significant impact on health if they occur during critical or sensitive periods, and occur within the community environment. Differences in exposure to risk and protective factors contribute to differences in health outcomes.

Risk Factors (weaken health)		Protective Factors (improve health)
- Lack of food	- Homelessness	- Nurturing family
- Living in poverty	- Unsafe neighborhoods	- Safe neighborhoods
- Domestic violence	- Environmental pollution	- Strong and positive relationships
- Racial discrimination	- Low birth weight	- Economic security
- Inadequate education opportunities		- Access to high quality schools
- Lack of access to quality health care services		- Access to quality health care services

So to improve health and wellbeing for adults and children, and their children’s children, we need to **increase the positive PROTECTIVE factors** and **reduce the negative RISK factors** in our lives. Sometimes we can’t control the risk factors, or we have learned to live with them. We can still change the path of our life outcome by seeking out the community supports available and using the resources that are available to provide protective factors.

South Milwaukee Health Department wants you to know we are here to help