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Tampa area ranks No. 23 on ACSM, WellPoint fittest cities list

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The Tampa metropolitan area is No. 23 on the American College of Sports Medicine's American Fitness Index for 2009, a ranking of 50 of the nation's most populous metropolitan areas.

Tampa ranked No. 21 on the 2008 index.

The fitness index data reflects a composite of preventive health behaviors, levels of chronic disease conditions, health care access, and community resources and policies that support physical activity, the organization said in a release.

In addition to a data report, the fitness index is a program designed to help communities identify opportunities to improve the health of their residents and expand community assets to better support active, healthy lifestyles, the release said.

The top-ranked community in 2009 was the Washington metro area, followed by Minneapolis-St. Paul, Denver, Boston and San Francisco.

Tampa was the highest ranked Florida metro area. Jacksonville ranked No. 28, Miami No. 31 and Orlando was unranked.

The Tampa-St. Petersburg-Clearwater metro area ranked 39th on personal health indicators related to health behaviors, chronic health problems and health care. For instance, 23.4 percent of Tampa metro residents smoke, compared to a U.S. average of 19.8 percent, an analysis of the index said.

The Tampa metro area ranked 15th on community and environmental indicators, which includes ball diamonds, park playgrounds and recreation centers per capita, the analysis said.

The American College of Sports Medicine compiled its health and community fitness report in partnership with the WellPoint Foundation, a private nonprofit organization wholly funded by **WellPoint Inc.** (NYSE: WLP).