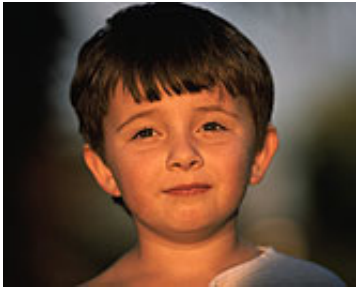


Annual report on U.S. kids' health a mixed bag

July 13 2012, By Steven Reinberg, HealthDay Reporter



There are fewer infant deaths and preterm births, but more kids live in poverty, government finds.

(HealthDay) -- Infant mortality, preterm births and teen births have dropped across the United States as have violent crime and victimization among children, U.S. health officials reported Friday.

But more [children](#) are living in poverty and fewer parents are working in these economically trying times, according to the annual government report assessing the well-being of the nation's children. And the fight against childhood obesity is not making much headway.

"There is good and bad here," Dr. Alan Guttmacher, director of the Eunice Kennedy Shriver U.S. National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, said during a Wednesday morning press conference on the report, *America's Children in Brief: Key National*

Indicators of Well-Being, 2012.

"Many of the health indicators continue a good trend, but [childhood obesity](#) and [childhood asthma](#) continue to be major problems," he said. "Clearly, there are issues in children's health that refer to our present economic situation, and we look forward to improvements in that as well. So I think it's a mixed picture but, overall, I think it's a good one."

On the downside, 10 percent of children don't have health insurance, and many of these children don't have a regular source for health care, he noted.

On the upside, the news on [infant mortality](#), which has been falling for many years.

"This is the all-time low," Edward Sondik, director of the U.S. [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#)'s National Center for Health Statistics, said during the press conference.

"We are also encouraged by the fourth consecutive annual drop in the [preterm birth](#) rate," Guttmacher added.

Highlights of the report include:

The Bad News

- [Obesity rates](#) for [kids](#) aged 6 to 17 stood at 18 percent in 2009-2010, down only 1 percent from 2007-2008.
- Asthma rates for those under 17 were virtually unchanged, at 9.4 percent in 2010 versus 9.6 percent in 2009.
- Fewer kids are living with an employed parent: 71 percent in 2010 versus 72 percent in 2009.

- More kids are living in poverty: 22 percent in 2010 compared to 21 percent in 2009. And they're younger: one in four was 5 years old or younger.
- More kids are living in counties with above allowable air pollution: 67 percent in 2010; 59 percent in 2009.

The Good News

- The teen [birth rate](#) dropped to 17 per 1,000 in 2010, from 20 per 1,000 in 2009.
- Preterm birth rate dropped to 12 percent in 2010, from 12.2 in 2009.
- Infant deaths dropped to 6.1 per 1,000 in 2010, from 6.4 per 1,000 births in 2009.
- Fewer kids are living in "food insecure" homes: 22 percent in 2010 versus 23 percent in 2009.
- More kids are being vaccinated with meningitis vaccine: 63 percent in 2010 versus 12 percent in 2006.
- Fewer teens are victims of violent crime: seven in 1,000 in 2010 versus 11 per 1,000 in 2009.
- Fewer kids are living in homes with smokers: 6.1 percent in 2010 versus 8.4 percent in 2005.

"I find this report very encouraging about the present, and very worrisome with regard to the future," said Dr. David Katz, director of the Yale Prevention Research Center at the Yale University School of Medicine.

Most of the actual health measures indicate improvement, he added.

"This is testimony to the power of knowledge based on research, and to the benefits of applying what we know from epidemiology to public health in the real world. These are encouraging and gratifying trends," he

said.

"But even as [health](#) improves, thanks to research conducted and applied, we are raising more children in poverty. Along with the important potential ill effects of poverty in the short-term, there is a potential adverse effect on personal advancement and educational attainment over the longer term," Katz added.

The report showed that in 2011, there were 73.9 million children in the United States, and they made up 24 percent of the population, down from a peak 36 percent at the end of the "baby boom" in 1964.

More information: For more information on children's health, visit the [U.S. National Library of Medicine](#).

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