

Federal study: Foster kids struggle to get health screenings

March 2 2015, by Kelli Kennedy

Some foster children are not getting their required medical screenings even though the visits are paid for by Medicaid, federal health investigators warn in a study released Monday.

The Health and Human Services' inspector general study looked at a random sample of roughly 400 foster children from California, Texas, New York and Illinois and found nearly 30 percent did not receive one or more of their required health screenings between 2011 and 2012. Of those who did not receive at least one required screening, 12 percent did not receive their initial screening and 17 percent did not receive one or more periodic screenings.

Experts say foster children tend to experience a high rate of chronic medical, developmental, and [mental health issues](#). They often face challenges getting access to health care. The American Academy of Pediatrics says that to identify and treat foster children's health problems, it's critical for states to ensure they get access to these services.

States have struggled with this issue for years. Investigators have been issuing reports about foster children's access to health care since 2003. A 2010 study of foster kids in nine states found that three of four foster children did not receive all required medical, vision, and hearing screenings even though they were enrolled in Medicaid. At least 60 percent of the children who received a medical screening were missing one component of it, according to the study.

Each state is responsible for ensuring that foster children receive health screenings on time, but the federal Administration for Children and Families under HHS funds the state programs and has ultimate oversight.

The report recommends that the agency work with states to identify barriers that prevent foster children from accessing [health care](#) and strategize ways to work with foster parents on this issue, including incentivizing families to increase participation in regular health screenings.

The Administration for Children and Families did not immediately respond to an email seeking comment Monday. The agency noted in the report that it documents whether children receive health screenings when they first come into care and on an ongoing bases, but admitted that it struggles to get documents showing whether the visits comply with each state's required timetable. The agency said it would focus on whether children's individual [health](#) needs were met in subsequent reviews.

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