

First public health survey of new dads to help improve outcomes for entire family

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While federal legislation requires tracking and reporting data on maternal health behaviors around childbirth, fathers have been overlooked in these public health efforts to improve maternal and infant

outcomes. Recognizing that new dads play an important role in the health and wellbeing of children and families, Craig Garfield, MD, from Ann & Robert H. Lurie Children's Hospital of Chicago partnered with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the Georgia Department of Public Health to develop and pilot a new survey on the health behaviors and experiences of men as they enter fatherhood.

Modeled on the annual surveillance tool that the CDC and public [health](#) departments have used for the past 35 years for new mothers called [PRAMS](#) (Pregnancy Risk Assessment Monitoring System), PRAMS for Dads for the first time provides data on the unique needs of new fathers. Findings were published in the journal *PLOS ONE*.

"Having a reliable source of information to see how men are impacted by the transition to fatherhood is an important first step in understanding how best to support families and children today," said Dr. Garfield, lead author on the study and founder of the Family & Child Health Innovations Program (FCHIP) at Lurie Children's. Dr. Garfield also is a Professor of Pediatrics and Medical Social Sciences at Northwestern University Feinberg School of Medicine.

"For example, we found that 70 percent of fathers in our survey were overweight or had obesity, so clearly public health strategies are needed to address this issue, which has significant health ramifications for the [child](#) and the entire family," explained Dr. Garfield. "Likewise, nearly 20 percent reported smoking, 13 percent were binge drinking and 10 percent had depressive symptoms since their infant's birth. These data, especially in combination with data from mothers, offer a roadmap of where we need to focus attention to improve the health and wellbeing of families during pregnancy and after a child is born."

Three other states—Massachusetts, Ohio and Michigan—are beginning to replicate the piloted process and the relatively inexpensive means to

survey new fathers.

"We have the tools and are ready to go," said Dr. Garfield. "We need partners on the state level who can secure funding and implement this surveillance for dads in their state. Equally important on the national level, just as we have had decades of federal funding to track the health of new mothers, we need the legislative will to build the public health infrastructure to track and respond to the needs of new dads, to help them truly be there for their child and family."

Previous research has linked fathers' involvement to improved maternal and infant health, including longer breastfeeding duration, lower levels of maternal depression, earlier prenatal care initiation, higher utilization of postnatal care services, and improved child developmental, psychological, and cognitive outcomes.

Studies also have revealed that men often view the birth of their child as a lever for change in their own health habits.

"Fatherhood presents an opportunity for men to improve their own health, and healthy fathers are more likely to participate in childrearing, support mothers in parenting, and have healthy children," added Dr. Garfield.

Focusing on the role of fathers in the health of children and families, Dr. Garfield launched in 2020 the Family & Child Health Innovations Program (FCHIP) at Lurie Children's. The FCHIP team conducts research, disseminates clinically relevant findings and advocates for improvements in [family](#) health policy.

Provided by Ann & Robert H. Lurie Children's Hospital of Chicago

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