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New Mexico has nation's 2nd highest uninsured rate

SANTA FE (AP) — Nearly one in four New Mexicans lacks health insurance coverage, and the state continues to have the nation's second highest uninsured rate, the U.S. Census Bureau reported Thursday.

About 23.1 percent of New Mexicans were uninsured in 2007-2008. That compares with 21.6 percent in 2005-2006. However, the Census Bureau figures for New Mexico do not reflect the impact of the current recession.

Nationally, the percentage of Americans without health insurance remained unchanged at slightly more than 15 percent, but the number of uninsured increased to 46.3 million in 2008, up from 45.7 million in 2007. About 468,000 New Mexicans were uninsured last year, the Census Bureau estimated.

In the latest Current Population Survey, the agency uses two-year averages — 2007-2008 — for evaluating changes within a state but it provides three-year averages — 2006-2008 — to make com-

parisons among states.

Texas had the largest share of its population without health insurance, 24.9 percent. New Mexico had a three-year average uninsured rate of 23 percent, followed by Florida with 20.5 percent.

The Census Bureau cautioned that the change in the uninsured rate in New Mexico was not statistically significant. The agency bases its estimates on a survey of households across the country and there's a relatively small sample from New Mexico.

The federal report on health care coverage — as well as poverty and income — reflects the last part of an economic upswing in New Mexico,

according to Gerry Bradley, an economist and research director for New Mexico Voices for Children, an Albuquerque-based group that advocates for social programs benefiting the needy and children.

The state's economy began to slide in late 2008, and that has continued this year. Bradley said the uninsured rate in the state has almost certain-

ly worsened as unemployment has increased to a 50-year high.

He said it was "scary" that the uninsured rate didn't improve — and possibly worsened somewhat — when New Mexico's economy was strong in 2007-2008.

"I have a feeling that health insurance trend is right. If that was happening during the good times, you can imagine what's going to happen during the bad times," Bradley said.

The Census Bureau said the poverty rate in New Mexico was 16.6 percent in 2007-2008 compared with 17.4 percent in 2005-2006. The state had a median income of \$44,081 in the most recent two-year period, compared with \$42,850 in 2005-2006. Neither of those were statistically meaningful changes, according to the agency.

Only two states and the District of Columbia had higher average poverty rates than New Mexico in 2006-2008: Mississippi at 20.5 percent, Louisiana at 17.1 percent, and D.C. at 17.6 percent.

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N.M. uninsured second highest

By Barry Massey
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