

Report: N.M. has low rate of healthy births

*Only 11.3 percent
of surveyed
pregnancies
deemed positive*

By Sue Major Holmes
The Associated Press

ALBUQUERQUE — New Mexico has a very low percentage of so-called healthy births, according to the latest Kids Count report.

The report is published each year by New Mexico Voices for Children, which highlights statistics that demonstrate the health and well-being of families and children.

The 2006 report focuses on information from the Pregnancy Risk Assessment Monitoring Systems survey, sent by the state Health Department to every new mother in New Mexico a few months after they give birth. Kids Count program manager Sara Beth Koplik said about 70 percent of the surveys are returned.

The surveys found only 11.3 percent of the births surveyed in New Mexico were healthy births, or one in which everything during the pregnancy was positive — the mother intended the pregnancy, received prenatal care, did not drink or smoke and wasn't a victim of domestic violence.

Women who didn't intend to get pregnant tend not to gain enough weight, have inadequate prenatal care and use drugs more.

Unintended pregnancies are associated with reduced cognitive, behavioral and emotional development in infants, increased risk for child abuse and neglect, and poor mental health as adults, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in Atlanta.

New Mexico ranks third-

Disease Control and Prevention in Atlanta.

New Mexico ranks third-highest in the nation in teenage births.

The state's rate of teen births has been declining, mirroring a drop nationally, but it still remains nearly one-and-a-half times higher than that of the United States as a whole.

The majority of the state's population is either Hispanic or American Indian, who have higher teen pregnancy rates.

"But if you look at each ethnicity in itself, we're not doing that badly," Koplik said.

White teens have a birth rate 16 percent above the national average for white teens; black teens have a rate 50 percent lower than that of black teens elsewhere. The rate for American Indian teens is 7 percent above the national rate; Hispanic teens are 4 percent above the national rate.

Koplik said the teen birth rate for blacks in New Mexico is considerably lower than nationally, reflecting "an enormous push in the African American community to decrease teen pregnancy, and that has been effective."

However, she said, the lower rates don't affect New Mexico's overall teen birth rate much because the black population is so small.

The surveys counter other stereotypes.

For example, the New Mexico women most likely to drink in their last three months of pregnancy are white and over age 34 with education beyond high school. New Mexico's teenage mothers are less likely to smoke than teen mothers across the nation; American Indian mothers are also less likely to smoke.

"It's not necessarily the youngest and poorest mothers who do the most harm," Koplik said Wednesday.

New Mexico also has a high rate of domestic violence that cuts across ethnic and economic lines. Mothers here report more physical abuse than all other surveyed states except South Carolina, Oklahoma and Arkansas.

ON THE WEB

◆ Voices for Children: www.nmvoices.org/kidscount.htm