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Violence Tied to Risky Births

By Leann Holt

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New Mexico's high rate of domestic violence against pregnant women is a big reason why the state has a low number of women who meet the criteria for healthy pregnancies and births, according to a report being released today by New Mexico Voices for Children.

Based on data compiled from the Pregnancy Risk Assessment Monitoring System survey, the report shows that only 11.3 percent of mothers meet all the criteria for healthy pregnancies, which include planned pregnancies, prenatal care, abstinence from alcohol and cigarettes and freedom from abuse while pregnant. Data were from 1998 to 2003.

"Overwhelmingly, the data indicate that New Mexico is not the best place to start out in life," said Sara Beth Koplik, director of Voices for Children's Kids Count Program.

In addition to a domestic violence rate against pregnant women that is almost double the average of the 28 states that participated in the PRAMS survey, lack of pre-natal care also contributed to New Mexico's low rating.

But there was some good news: the number of women who smoked and drank alcohol during the last trimester of pregnancy was lower than the 28-state average.

Lt. Gov. Diane Denish said the report does not reflect the improvements that have been made since she and Gov. Bill Richardson took office in 2003.

Since that time, funding for domestic violence shelters and prevention programs has doubled to more than \$13 million, and a new program to insure pregnant women has been implemented. Home visitation programs which work to improve the chances of healthy births are increasing, she said.