



PRESS RELEASE

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New Mexico shows improvement, but is still last in some birth outcomes

ALBUQUERQUE – The conditions under which babies are born tend to be improving across the nation, but New Mexico continues to lag behind, according to the new report “The Right Start for America’s Newborns: City and State Trends,” just released by the Annie E. Casey Foundation.

While the percentage of births to teens is declining across the U.S., New Mexico still ranks last in this category. We’re also at the very bottom in the percentages of births to unmarried women.

Perhaps the most telling statistic is the percentage of women who get late or no prenatal care. While the percentage of women nationwide who are getting prenatal care is steadily rising, in New Mexico that percentage dropped between 2001 and 2003 (the last year for which data is available), putting us dead last in this indicator as well.

The conditions surrounding a baby’s birth can have lifelong effects on the child’s development and readiness for school. Specifically, low-birthweight and preterm infants are at increased risk for developmental delays that can affect their chances of being left behind in school. New Mexico ranks well below the national average on these two critical indicators.

“One reason New Mexico does so poorly in these studies is that we have high rates of poverty as well as people without access to health care,” said Sara Beth Koplik, Ph.D., program manager for New Mexico Voices for Children. “The outcomes for births to teens don’t tend to be as good as they are for women in their 20s and 30s.”

New Mexico ranks well below the national average on a whole host of related indicators – among them: child and teen deaths, and the percentage of children living in poverty, in single parent households, and in families without one parent who is employed full-time, year-round.

“Poverty clearly plays a role in birth outcomes. Time and again poor states like New Mexico, Mississippi and Alabama find themselves on the bottom of these lists, while wealthier states like New Hampshire and Massachusetts take the top spots,” Koplik said. “Without universal health coverage, or some other means to assist the working poor, New Mexico will never lift itself off of the bottom rung.”

Not all the news is bleak, however. New Mexico does rank higher than the national average when it comes to infant mortality and the percentage of women who smoked during pregnancy. As a city, Albuquerque ranks closer the middle of the spectrum, due in large part to lower levels of poverty and greater access to health care.

The entire “The Right Start for America’s Newborns: City and State Trends” report is available at www.aecf.org/kidscount/sld/rightstart.jsp

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