



April 30, 2012

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Conference call at 10 a.m. today Please call 1-888-291-0079 and enter 9118 162#.

Disadvantaged from the beginning: Too many babies don't get the 'Right Start'

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A collaborative project of
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HUMAN SERVICES**
and
MICHIGAN'S CHILDREN

Too many babies born in Michigan are not getting the "Right Start" in life, a new report concludes, with dramatic disadvantages for children in some areas of the state as well as those born to African American and Hispanic mothers.

[The report](#), released today by the Michigan League for Human Services' Kids Count in Michigan project, looks at eight maternal and infant health measures. It also provides an overall ranking for 81 of the 83 counties.

"These data are early indicators of how successful our next generation will be -- and in turn how successful our state will be," said Kids Count in Michigan Project Director Jane Zehnder-Merrell. "We know we won't have a well-educated and healthy citizenry without giving children the foundation they need."

The top 10 (best) counties are: Houghton, Ottawa, Livingston, Leelanau, Midland, Grand Traverse, Oakland, Emmet, Clinton and Washtenaw. The bottom 10 (worst) counties are: Berrien, Calhoun, Alcona, Genesee, Clare, Lake, Saginaw, Wayne, Crawford and Luce. Ontonagon and Keweenaw counties had too few measures with reliable rates for an overall ranking.

"This information will be given to local and state policymakers with the hope that looking at areas of success as well as areas where improvements are needed will help guide resources," said Gilda Z. Jacobs, president & CEO of the League.

For example, the report calls for additional funding to implement strategies from the Department of Community Health's October summit on infant mortality. Gov. Rick Snyder has recommended less than \$1 million and that was rejected by the appropriations subcommittees in both houses.

Low-birthweight babies -- born weighing less than 5.5 pounds -- represent more than half of infant deaths in Michigan. Almost 10,000 low-birthweight babies are born each year in the state.

Between 2000 and 2010, the rate of low birthweight babies worsened by 7 percent. African Americans babies had double the risk of being born too small -- 14 percent compared with 7 percent of white and Hispanic babies.

African American babies were at higher risk on seven of the eight indicators (on all but mothers who smoked during pregnancy) while Hispanic babies had higher risks on five of the eight.

Of the eight indicators, the report looks at five measures that can be tracked over time. The good news is that three of the trends are improving -- with drops in the percentage of births to teens, repeat births to teens and preterm births between 2000 and 2010.

(more)

The biggest improvement is a 15 percent drop in the percentage of babies born to teens who were already mothers. Repeat teen births represented 18 percent of all teen births in 2010, down from 21 percent in 2000.

The two worsening trends were the low-birthweight babies and the dramatic increase in births to unmarried women, rising from 34 percent in 2000 to more than 41 percent in 2010.

"This is a troubling trend because moms who are single at the time of birth are less likely to receive child support and their child is at very high risk for growing up in poverty," Zehnder-Merrell said.

The report calls on policymakers to:

- Approve a Michigan-based state health exchange, provided in the Affordable Care Act, which will provide many additional health benefits to women. The Senate has passed legislation, and Gov. Snyder indicates he will sign the legislation, but the state House of Representatives needs to pass it.
- Fund the recommendations from the 2011 Summit on Infant Mortality, including the promotion of awareness of environmental exposures on women as well as good preconception health.
- Strengthen the safety net programs such as food stamps and cash assistance that help low-income families and their children during economic downturns.
- Consider the impact of decisions on communities of color. As diversity has increased, better opportunities for healthy births are the best route to producing a vibrant, strong and educated workforce.

The report can be found online at www.milhs.org

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Resources for reporters: Please visit www.kidscount.org/datacenter for more data or to create charts on trend information. A conference call with Jane Zehnder-Merrell will be held at 10 a.m. today, (Monday). Please call 1-888-291-0079 and enter 9118 162#. Individual interviews can also be arranged by calling (517) 487-5436.

Right Start is part of the Kids Count in Michigan project, which is funded by the Annie E. Casey Foundation, The Skillman Foundation, Blue Cross Blue Shield of Michigan Foundation and United Ways. The Kids Count in Michigan project is a partnership between the Michigan League for Human Services and Michigan's Children.