

Oct. 21, 2014

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Kansas KIDS COUNT report shows marked decrease in timely immunizations

TOPEKA—After several years of improvement, the on-time immunization rate for Kansas children has fallen sharply, according to this year’s Kansas KIDS COUNT report.

Between 2009 and 2012, the immunization rate climbed from 63 percent to 72 percent. But for 2013, the rate declined to 61 percent. This reflects a national trend of more parents opting out of certain vaccinations.

“Timely immunization not only keeps children healthy but also protects others, including infants who are too young for vaccinations and people with compromised immunity,” said Shannon Cotsoradis, president and CEO of Kansas Action for Children. “It also prevents the spread of dangerous diseases that can lead to serious illness and even death.”

The Kansas KIDS COUNT report also shows a decline in Medicaid enrollment among children. The average monthly enrollment in 2013 was 220,300 children. The previous year, the average monthly enrollment was 221,444 children. Average monthly enrollment in the Children’s Health Insurance Program, however, increased to 54,806 from 48,603. Medicaid and CHIP are part of KanCare, the state’s public health insurance program.

“Health care coverage ensures that children get the preventative care they need to stay active and attend school ready to learn,” said Cotsoradis. “We want all kids to be covered but it’s especially disturbing that our poorest kids are going without health insurance.”

Unfortunately, without access to timely enrollment data it’s difficult to fully explain this trend and find ways to address it. The overall uninsurance rate continues to remain stagnant at 6.14 percent.

Kansas Action for Children’s annual Kansas KIDS COUNT report measures county-by-county how kids are doing across more than 20 indicators of health, education and economic success.

The report shows positive trends in several areas:

- Kansas has seen significant improvement in the percentage of elementary schools offering pre-K or 4-year-old at-risk programs. In 2014, more than half—50.38 percent—of elementary schools offered such programs, compared to 44.81 percent in 2009.

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- The rate for pregnant women receiving at least adequate prenatal care has increased from 77.52 percent to 81.89 percent in the past five years.
- Youth tobacco use and binge drinking have decreased significantly.

However, there is room for improvement in other indicators.

- 21.16 percent of Kansas children live in poverty.
- 50.03 percent of Kansas children qualify for free or reduced price lunch.
- Far fewer poor children—only 15,419—benefitted from the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families program (TANF) in 2013, down from 25,981 in 2011. Policy changes to TANF have made it more difficult for the state’s poorest families to access cash assistance.

KIDS COUNT data is available for every Kansas county. To download your county’s fact sheet or the statewide fact sheet, visit kac.org/kidscount.

To see how Kansas as a whole compares to other states, visit the online KIDS COUNT Data Center: datacenter.kidscount.org/ks.

Kansas KIDS COUNT is produced by Kansas Action for Children and funded, in part, by the Annie E. Casey Foundation. The findings and conclusions presented are those of KAC and do not necessarily reflect the opinions of the foundation.