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Report: Nearly 1 in 3 teens don't graduate high school

By Julie Poppen, Rocky Mountain News
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Colorado's immunization rate is improving and fewer women are smoking during pregnancy.

That's the good news found in a report released today by the Colorado Children's Campaign.

But 14 percent of the state's children lack health insurance coverage, and nearly one in three young people will not graduate from high school in this state.

That's the bad news in the 14th annual KidsCount report, which uses indicators about health and education to paint a picture of the well-being of the state's 1.2 million children.

"We see things showing that adults in Colorado are doing really well but we have so many kids who are continuing to not have their basic needs met," said Megan Ferland, president of the Colorado Children's Campaign.

Ferland said demographic projections show that there will be 1.4 million children in Colorado in eight years, up from 1.2 million now.

"Obviously, having more kids is going to make the problems even more complicated to address," she said.

Here are other key findings in the 2007 report.

- In 2005 in Colorado, the rate of mothers who received prenatal care in the first trimester was 79 percent, compared to 84 percent nationally.

- Fourteen percent — or nearly 180,000 — of Colorado's children under age 19 lack health insurance, which compares to 12 percent nationally. The state's uninsured children cost the private sector \$50 million and the government \$29 million annually, the report found.

Uninsured children are less likely to be immunized and more prone to health problems.

- Nearly one in three students did not graduate from high school in Colorado in 2005, despite the fact that the state was ranked third in the nation for the number of people over age 25 with bachelor's degrees and the state's median family income was ranked 12th at \$62,000.

The Children's Campaign, a nonprofit advocacy group, compiles the annual statistical report from data collected by state and federal agencies.

And the news isn't all bad.

Here are some positive trends in the 2007 report.

- In 2005, Colorado's childhood immunization rate reached 83 percent — up from 77 percent in 2004 — ranking 16th nationally up from 44th the previous year.

- The percent of women who smoked during pregnancy decreased from 12 percent in 1995 to 8 percent in 2005.

- Over the past decade, the rate of teen deaths due to injury decreased by one third.

- The percentage of kindergartners enrolled in full-day programs doubled since 2001, from 14 to 28 percent, but there are still 10 counties with no children in full-day kindergarten.

Research suggests that students in all-day kindergarten make stronger gains in math and reading over the course of their year in kindergarten than their peers in half-day programs.

Nationally, the rate of students attending full-day kindergarten was 65 percent in 2003.

"That is a fundamental building block for so many kids," Ferland said.