



## NEWS RELEASE

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### **Better Prospects for Milwaukee's Babies** But City Continues to Lag Behind Rest of Wisconsin

While the gap is shrinking, newborns in Milwaukee continue to face greater challenges than babies born in the rest of Wisconsin, according to a new Child Trends/KIDS COUNT report. *The Right Start for America's Newborns: A Decade of City and State Trends (1990-1999)* compares the nation's 50 largest cities and all 50 states on eight key measures related to a healthy start to life.

"We're delighted to see that outcomes for moms and babies in Milwaukee have improved in a couple of areas over the decade," said Anne Arnesen, executive director of the Wisconsin Council on Children and Families. "Of course, on some indicators we had no where to go but up. Milwaukee still ranks among the worst big cities in far too many categories."

Nationwide, big cities gained ground on the states, as urban areas generally improved more than the country as a whole during the 1990s. Several of the indicators tracked in the report are closely tied to poverty.

"It is not surprising that in Milwaukee, where the child poverty rate is three times that of the state as a whole, more families are struggling," Arnesen said.

Five of the eight measures are directly related to access to maternal and child health care.

"A key factor in Milwaukee's improvement has been Wisconsin's commitment to health care access," Arnesen noted. "If we hope to sustain that progress, support for programs like BadgerCare and Medicaid must be top priorities as state policy-makers wrestle with the state's current budget crisis."

(more)

Findings for Wisconsin include:

- **Births to women with low education lower than U.S. average.** In 1999, the percentage of Wisconsin births to women with less than 12 years of education was 16 percent. This percentage was lower than the U.S. average, which was 22 percent in 1999.
- **Births to unmarried women on the rise.** Between 1990 and 1999, the percentage of Wisconsin births to unmarried women steadily increased from 24 percent to 29 percent.
- **Births to smokers higher than U.S. average, despite modest decline.** Between 1998 and 1999, the percentage of births to women who smoked during pregnancy decreased from 18 percent to 17 percent. However, the Wisconsin percentage remained higher than the U.S. average, which was 13 percent in 1999.
- **Percentage of pre-term births just below U.S. average, despite slight increase.** Between 1997 and 1999, the percentage of Wisconsin births that were pre-term increased from 10 percent to 11 percent. However, this Wisconsin percentage was lower than the 1999 U.S. average, which was 12 percent.

Findings for Milwaukee include:

- **Milwaukee has one of highest percentages of teen births among nation's largest cities.** In 1999, 20 percent of Milwaukee births were to teens. This percentage was substantially higher than the 50-city average, which was 14 percent in 1999.
- **Despite significant drop, Milwaukee among highest in repeat teen births.** Between 1990 and 1999, the percentage of Milwaukee teen births to young women who were already mothers decreased from 35 percent to 28 percent. However, the 1999 percentage was still among the highest in the 50 largest cities and substantially higher than the 50-city average, which was 23 percent in 1999.
- **Percentage of births to unmarried women among highest of the largest U.S. cities.** In 1999, 59 percent of Milwaukee births were to unmarried women. This percentage compares with the 50-city average of 43 percent in 1999.
- **Smoking during pregnancy drops, but still significantly higher than 50-city average.** Between 1997 and 1999, the percentage of births to women who smoked during pregnancy decreased from 20 percent to 18 percent. However, the 1999 Milwaukee percentage was well above the 50-city average, which stood at 10 percent in 1999.

“The upcoming debate over the state budget must take into account the immediate and long term needs of these vulnerable families,” Arnesen said. “Policy makers must avoid

the temptation to cut or eliminate funding for crucial health services in the face of immense pressure to reduce spending.”

The web-based full report is available online at [www.aecf.org/kidscount/rightstart2002](http://www.aecf.org/kidscount/rightstart2002). It allows users to create custom reports such as state and city profiles, line graphs showing trends over time, color-coded U.S. maps, and ranking tables, all generated dynamically from the Right Start database.

A joint project of Child Trends and KIDS COUNT, an initiative of The Annie E. Casey Foundation, the online report presents a full decade of data on eight measures of healthy births for each state and the nation’s 50 largest cities, and it identifies cities and states with the best and worst performance on each measure. The report is based on data from the National Center for Health Statistics.

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