POLICY & PRACTICE

Most Newborns Are Now Screened

All 50 states and the District of Columbia now require that every newborn be screened for most life-threatening disorders, although Pennsylvania and West Virginia still are in the process of implementing their expanded programs, according to a report from the March of Dimes. State laws and rules vary, but all states require screening for 21 or more of the 29 serious genetic or functional disorders on the panel recommended by the American College of Medical Genetics, the March of Dimes said in its report. The screening laws and rules are a marked improvement over what they were 3 years ago, when the charity's report card found that only 38% of infants were born in states that required screening for 21 or more of the 29 "core" conditions. Now, 24 states and Washington, D.C., require screening for all 29 disorders, with more states expected to join them this year, the report said. "This is a sweeping advance for public health," Dr. R. Rodney Howell, chairman of the Health and Human Services Secretary's Advisory Committee on Heritable Disorders in Newborns and Children, said in a statement.

CPSC Enforces Lead Law

The Consumer Product Safety Commission has begun enforcing a strict new limit on lead reaching children: that consumer products intended for those 12 years and younger cannot have more than 600 parts per million of lead in any accessible part. The rule is a key component of the Consumer Product Safety Improvement Act, approved last year in the wake of multiple toy recalls. In a statement intended to clarify its stance on enforcement of the new law, the CPSC said that it will not impose penalties against anyone for making, importing, distributing, or selling several types of products that generally don't contain lead, if those products, when tested, do turn out to have too much lead in them. These include products made of natural materials which rarely contain lead, ordinary children's books printed after 1985, and most textiles.

Foster Children's Health Care Varies

Access to health care for foster children varies dramatically from state to state, according to a Government Accountability Office report on health practices in foster care. Some states have increased Medicaid payments to encourage physicians to provide needed care to foster children, while other states have given nurses or other health care managers responsibility for ensuring that children receive necessary health care. Still, the report found that many children in foster care have not received appropriate physical and mental health services, Rep. Jim McDermott (D-Wash.), who requested the report, said in a statement. Rep. McDermott said that the House subcommittee on family support that he chairs will consider additional steps to ensure that foster children receive the care they need.

AAP Backs Drinking Age Campaign

The American Academy of Pediatrics has thrown its support behind federal legislation that would back a minimum legal drinking age of 21 and provide new tools for health care providers to reduce underage drinking. The bill (H.R. 1028), introduced by Rep. Lucille Roybal-Allard (D-Calif.) and Rep. Mary Bono-Mack (R-Calif.), would create a $22 million annual media campaign to describe the benefits of the 21 minimum drinking age and encourage parental support for such a law. H.R. 1028 would also provide grants to professional pediatric-medical organizations to educate their members on alcohol screening, brief interventions, referral, and treatment. And community antidrug coalitions would get grants to integrate health care providers into underage drinking programs. "The data [are] irrefutable: The 21 minimum legal drinking age saves lives," AAP President David Tayloe said in a statement.

Pediatrician to Head CDC

Pediatrician Richard E. Besser has been named acting director of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, succeeding Dr. Julie Gerberding, who stepped down with the change in administrations. Dr. Besser previously served as the epidemiology section chief in the CDC's respiratory diseases branch, as acting chief of the meningitis and special pathogens branch in the National Center for Infectious Disease, and as the medical director of "Get Smart: Know When Antibiotics Work," the CDC's national campaign to promote appropriate antibiotic use. The Obama administration said Dr. Besser will serve as CDC director until a permanent director is named.

—Jane Anderson