

## POLICY & PRACTICE

### Child Well-Being Index 2005

Violence and risky behaviors among children, such as teen birth, smoking, and use of alcohol and illegal drugs, have declined dramatically in the last 30 years, but obesity is still a problem, according to the 2005 Index of Child Well-Being, released by the Foundation for Child Development. The overall child health score is 17% below 1975 levels, mainly because of obesity. "It took a generation for overweight and obesity to reach these extreme levels, and it's going to take at least a generation to turn those levels back," said Kenneth Land, Ph.D., the Duke University sociologist who developed the index. In the meantime, violent crime has dropped by more than 64% since 1975, and childhood victimization by violent crime has fallen by more than 38%. But these figures may rise again, given that increased federal funding for community policing and a strong national economy are no longer in effect, Dr. Land said. Births to teenage mothers have dropped by nearly 37%. Though smoking continues to decline, the rate of binge drinking increased slightly, from nearly 28% in 2003, to 29.2% in 2004, the study found.

### Senator Takes on Junk Food Ads

Sen. Tom Harkin (D-Iowa) is taking on the food industry and broadcasters with legislation that would restore the Federal Trade Commission's authority to restrict "junk food" advertising to children under age 18 years, and give the Secretary of Agriculture the authority to prohibit all junk food advertising in schools. In addition, he called on the food industry to set age-appropriate guidelines for marketing to children. Earlier this year, the Center for Science in the Public Interest issued guidelines calling on companies not to market drinks such as sodas, sports drinks, and sweetened iced teas to children.

### Television Promotes Bullying

Too much television can lead to bullying, a study of the viewing habits of young children from the University of Washington determined (Arch. Pediatr. Adolesc. Med. 2005;159:384-8). "The early home environment, including cognitive stimulation, emotional support and exposure to television, has a significant impact on bullying in grade school," concluded Frederick J. Zimmerman, Ph.D., who found that each hour of television viewed per day at age 4 increased the odds for subsequent bullying at a later age. Reading to children and spending time with them decreases their chances of becoming bullies. The findings were based on data from 1,266 4-year-olds whose bullying was tracked at ages 6-11.

### Bill on Livestock Antibiotics

Sen. Edward M. Kennedy (D-Mass.) and Sen. Olympia Snowe (R-Maine) have introduced a bill to cut down on the amount of antibiotics used in livestock, citing evidence that increased antibiotic use in animals leads to reduced effectiveness in humans. "Antibiotics are among the greatest miracles of modern medicine, yet we are destroying them faster than the pharmaceutical industry can create replacements," Sen. Kennedy said in a statement. "If doctors lose these critical remedies, the most vulnerable among us will suffer the

most—children, the elderly, [and] persons with HIV/AIDS, who are most in danger of resistant infections." The measure would require the Food and Drug Administration to withdraw approval for nontherapeutic use of eight classes of antibiotics in food-producing animals after 2 years if the use has not been proven harmless during that time. It also requires manufacturers of animal drugs or drug-containing feed to make their sales records available to government regulators for tracking emerging antimicrobial resistance.

### Uninsured Projections

The plight of the uninsured won't likely be resolved anytime soon. More than 1 in 4 American workers—nearly 56 million—under age 65 will be uninsured in 2013 because of the increasing unaffordability of health insurance, a health affairs Web-exclusive article reported. Growth in per capita health spending is expected to outpace median personal income by 2.4% every year, making health insurance unaffordable for more Americans and causing health care coverage to continue its decline. "It is unlikely that we will be able to solve the problem of the uninsured without some form of universal health insur-

ance requiring contributions from some combination of employers, employees, and taxpayers," the study said. Children have fared slightly better than adults, mostly because of coverage provided by the State Children's Health Insurance Program. The researchers estimated that for every 1% increase in the percentage of uninsured adult workers from 1979 to 2002, there was only a 0.45% increase in the percentage of uninsured children. The researchers based the estimates of the uninsured on federal projections of health spending, personal income, and other population characteristics.

—Jennifer Silverman

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