

POLICY & PRACTICE

Rise in Uninsured Children

One-third of the uninsured children in this country went without medical care for an entire year, according to "Going Without: America's Uninsured Children," a report from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. By comparison, nearly 88% of insured children received care during the same period. In 17 populous states, about one in every three uninsured children received no medical care during the year. In 21 other states, the number was one in four. Even uninsured kids who received medical care didn't always see a physician when they needed one. Uninsured children were 10 times more likely not to receive the medical care they needed, compared with children who have insurance. The report was released during a kick-off event for the Covering Kids & Families campaign, a nationwide effort to enroll eligible children in public coverage programs during the back-to-school season.

Kids Shape Up

A new obesity-prevention initiative chartered by the American Diabetes Association aims to provide leadership and information "to help families and communities make improved nutrition and greater physical activity a priority, especially for children," said Michael Jensen, M.D., president of a new organization called Shaping America's Health: Association for Weight Management and Obesity Prevention. The group plans to develop clinical guidelines and best practices for health care professionals working to help individuals better manage their weight, said Dr. Jensen, professor of medicine at the Mayo Clinic, Rochester, Minn. The new organization will incorporate the "Shaping America's Youth" program, a public-private partnership launched in 2003 in cooperation with the ADA, the Office of the Surgeon General, and other organizations.

Teen Driving

Although most recognize that the summer driving season is dangerous for teens, September is the third deadliest month for teen motor vehicle deaths, according to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration. Of the 6,434 youth (involving ages 15-20) motor vehicle fatalities in 2000, July saw more deaths (644) than any other month, followed by June (600), September (590), and August (587), the agency said. "Per mile driven, teen drivers are more likely to be involved in a fatal crash than other drivers," said Mary Pat McKay, M.D., and director of the Center for Injury Prevention and Control at the George Washington University Medical Center in Washington. "The increased risk for crashing results from a combination of inexperience and immaturity—particularly a tendency toward riskier behavior."

The Meth Crisis Continues

The methamphetamine crisis has meant major problems for law enforcement and child welfare workers, according to two new surveys by the National Association of Counties. The first survey, which included responses from 500 local law enforcement agencies, found that 87% reported an increase in methamphetamine-related arrests beginning 3 years ago. More than half

the counties said methamphetamine was their largest drug problem, with an estimated one-fifth of jail inmates incarcerated because of meth-related crimes. In the second survey, which involved child welfare officials in more than 300 counties, 40% of respondents reported increased out-of-home placements because of meth addiction in the last year, and nearly two-thirds of officials agreed that the nature of the meth-using parent increased the difficulty of family reunification. "As our surveys confirmed, methamphetamine abuse is a national drug crisis that requires national

leadership," said Valerie Brown, chair of the association's membership committee, in testimony to a House subcommittee. "A comprehensive and intergovernmental approach is needed."

Influence of Free Drug Samples

Readily accessible, free drug samples can influence the prescribing behavior of residents, according to a study from the University of Minnesota and Abbott Northwestern Hospital, in Minneapolis. Researchers observed 29 internal medicine residents over a 6-month period in an inner-city primary care clinic. After selecting drug classes where samples of heavily

advertised drugs were provided to the clinic, and where lower-priced alternative formulations existed, the authors looked for prescribing differences between physicians who had access to free samples and those who had been randomized to a group that agreed not to use samples. "We found that resident physicians with access to drug samples in clinic were more likely to write new prescriptions for heavily advertised drugs and less likely to recommend over-the-counter drugs than their peers," said lead author Richard F. Adair, M.D. The study was published in the August issue of the American Journal of Medicine.

—Jennifer Silverman

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