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Data book provides look at health, safety, education

The highly anticipated "Status of Children Today" data book has been released by Children First for Oregon.

The booklet includes the most current county-by-county data related to teens, schools, childhood safety and early childhood. A special section provides statistics on children's health insurance coverage, access of health care and overall health.

Findings indicate that nearly 10 percent of children under 18 were uninsured in 1998 (9.6 percent), an increase from 8.4 percent in 1996. Additionally,

Oregon's poorest children are almost twice as likely to be uninsured than other children.

The numbers reflect the well-being of Oregon's children and is a blueprint for setting social change. According to Children First for Oregon, lack of accessible and affordable health care affects the state's future: money not spent today on ensuring children's health costs more in the future.

For example, every dollar spent on prenatal care saves \$4 in medical costs within the first year. Every low birthweight de-

livery that is prevented saves \$14,000 to \$30,000 per child in health care costs. On average, hospital costs for a low-birth-weight baby are 10 times the cost of prenatal care, and each dollar spent on measles-mumps-rubella vaccines saves \$21 on treatment costs.

New federal funds in 1998 allowed the state to expand children's health care coverage through the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP).

Children under the age of 19 in families with annual income less than \$23,208 for a family of

three are eligible for CHIP. Since its implementation in Oregon in July 1998, CHIP has provided the same coverage and services for children as the Oregon Health Plan.

A critical eligibility requirement of this coverage is that children must be completely uninsured for at least six months prior to enrollment.

The following statistics are among the published findings:

• Only an estimated 37 percent of uninsured children who are eligible for the program are enrolled.