

Report details health gaps among young

Children First for Oregon hopes data it's releasing today will spur leaders and the public to action

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A group that advocates for Oregon's children plans to open its proverbial family photo album to state legislators today.

Its snapshots show that:

- The number of children without health insurance has grown, and the state's ability to meet those children's medical needs is inadequate.
- It's tougher for rural children to get health care than it is for urban children. Some rural counties have no doctors or dentists.
- More than one-quarter of Oregon's toddlers are not adequately immunized against vaccine-preventable diseases.

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■ Reports of child abuse and neglect have risen dramatically.

Children First for Oregon, a nonprofit watchdog group, will illustrate those trends and others when it releases the "1998 County Data Book: The Status of Oregon's Children," today at the state Capitol. The book compiles a wide variety of statistics related to the health and well-being of children for every county in Oregon. It was published in collaboration with the Office for Oregon Health Plan Policy and Research, the Oregon Commission on Children and Families and the Oregon Department of Human Resources.

Children First hopes that not only the public but also the state's leaders and policy-makers find power in the numbers.

The report, said Tonia Hunt, a

public policy associate for the organization, "is a call for accountability in the state. We want to make sure our legislators and elected leaders know about this data and help them find policy solutions."

While it has the attention of House Speaker Lynn Spodgrass, Senate President Brady Adams and Sharon Kitzhaber, the governor's wife — all of whom have been invited to the event dubbed Children's Health Day at the Capitol — Children First plans to push a long list of legislative priorities. They include expanding the state-financed Children's Health Insurance Program to more fully take advantage of federal matching funds, eliminating eligibility barriers that may keep some of the state's children from getting the medical attention they need and using money from the recent tobacco settlement on chil-

dren's health care.

The organization's report draws on data from such sources as the Oregon Health Division, the State Office for Services to Children and Families, the Oregon Department of Education and the Center for Population Research and Census at Portland State University.

Some highlights:

■ **INSURANCE:** An estimated 78,000 children, or 9.5 percent of Oregonians younger than 18, were uninsured in 1996, up from 8.4 percent in 1996. The state's poorest children were almost twice as likely to be uninsured as those in families whose incomes were above the federal poverty level.

■ **ACCESS:** The geographical distribution of health care workers, lack of transportation, language and other cultural barriers all can keep children from doctors' and dentists'

offices. For instance, according to the Oregon Health Division, Multnomah County had one primary care provider per 594 residents; Gilliam, Lake, Sherman and Wheeler counties had no primary care providers.

■ **IMMUNIZATIONS:** In 1997, 73 percent of 2-year-olds were estimated to be up-to-date on their immunizations. That's up from 67 percent in 1994, but it's not good enough, health officials say. More than 4,600 vaccine-preventable diseases were reported among Oregonians ages 17 and younger between 1987 and 1997.

■ **PRENATAL CARE:** The rate of care during mothers' first trimester of pregnancy has improved. In 1997,

81 percent of babies in Oregon were born to mothers who had received early prenatal care, an increase of 7 percent from 1990. However, only 62 percent of babies born to mothers ages 17 and younger received prenatal care beginning in the first trimester.

■ **TEEN PREGNANCY:** For the second consecutive year, Oregon's teen pregnancy rate declined. More than 3,100 Oregon girls ages 17 and younger were pregnant in 1997, a 5 percent drop from the previous year.

■ **SUICIDE ATTEMPTS:** In 1997, the provisional teen suicide rate was 201 attempts per 100,000 for Oregonians ages 10 to 17 — 8 percent

better than the 1996 rate. The numbers, from the Oregon Health Division, measured only attempts that resulted in hospitalization or death.

■ **CHILD ABUSE AND NEGLECT:** In 1997, 11.8 children per 1,000 were victims of abuse or neglect. The rate, which represents only those children whose cases were investigated and confirmed by the State Office for Services to Children and Families, is 16 percent worse than in 1996.

Children First produced the "Status of Oregon's Children" report with a grant from the Annie E. Casey Foundation.