

Children: More child care is another need in the county

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"We have our share of tragic accidents," he said. Dawnelle Marshall, the director of the Douglas County Health Department's community health division, said the county figures for infant mortality were lower than the 12 deaths the Children First report attributed to the county. Marshall said the county had eight infant deaths, defined as children who died before they were 1 year old.

She said the difference in numbers could probably be explained by babies who didn't die in Douglas County. Despite that, Marshall said eight babies were too many.

"We don't want to lose one baby," she said. Five out of the eight infants who died were premature.

"They were just little. They weren't ready to be born," Marshall said.

Other babies are born with birth defects, some of which are genetic and undetectable before birth. "It's just one of those sad things of nature," she said.

The 18 percent decline in the number of low birth weight babies detailed in the report might be explained by the high number of twins born in 1997 which affected the statistics that year, Marshall said. Twins are considered healthy at lower weights than single babies.

Low birth weight babies and infant mortality could be connected to the higher-than-state average rate of smoking, she said. Information about smoking and other prenatal issues are the subject of the county's health education program, Marshall said.

"We're always working for more education, more prevention," she said.

More child care is another need in the county. According to the

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report, there are 18 child-care spaces available for every 100 children up to 12 years old.

Cynthia Hurkes, the program director of Douglas County Child Care Resource and Referral, said her numbers are a little more optimistic. She said the agency, part of Umpqua Community Action Network, has identified 19 child-care slots for every 100 children. Those spaces represent child care her agency has identified through a providers registry.

She said the amount of child care has increased since last year. The number, however, could go down in

the wake of new state regulations. Those rules require on-site visits to day care facilities; first aid training and CPR training for child-care workers; and food handler permits for employees.

While the law will probably lead to less available child care, some providers refuse to jump through all the hoops required. It will ultimately lead to a higher quality of child care, Hurkes said.

Besides a lack of overall spaces, Douglas County parents have a difficult time finding care for odd hours, such as during graveyard and swing shifts. There is also a need for infant and toddler care, Hurkes said.

The annual Children First report was published in collaboration with the Child Care Division of the Oregon Employment Department, the Oregon Commission on Children and Families and the Oregon Department of Human Resources.

County child deaths, infant mortality top state averages

Report: Advocacy group issues information on children's topics

By **KELLY ADAMS**
The News-Review

A report on the status of children found the rates of child deaths, infant mortality and suicide attempts in Douglas County were higher than state averages.

The availability of child care is also on the decline, according to the report.

The Status of Oregon's Children 1999 County Data Book looked at statistics for 1998, examining issues such as child safety, school performance and teen pregnancy rates. The data was released by Children First for Oregon, an advocacy organization formed to make children's issues a priority in the state.

There were 8 child deaths per 100,000 children in Douglas County. That's about double the statewide rate.

Steve Darling, the branch manager for the State Office for Services to Children and Families, said that rate is misleading because there are only about 100,000 people total in Douglas County and the county is being compared to much larger, metropolitan areas.

A fatality review team that consists of members of the SCF office, the medical examiner and the district attorney's office investigates every child death in the county, Darling said.

Two of the most recent cases were the 14-month-old Sutherlin girl who died after strangling on a window blind cord and a boy who was hit by a car as he ran across Interstate 5. There hasn't been a death caused by abuse in more than 10 years, Darling said. Most fatalities are a result of suicides or accidents.

"Probably we need to take a look at that," Darling said.

Test Zacher, a deputy district attorney for Douglas County, is the chairman of the fatality review team. The goal of the team is to identify any mistakes made during the investigation of a child's death and to take steps to prevent similar accidents in the future. Looking at the statistics for 1998, he said children died from a variety of causes, including car accidents, drowning and suicides.