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# Oregon's U.S. health standing up slightly

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PORTLAND, Ore. (AP) — Oregon's ranking on a list of the healthiest states jumped slightly this year, thanks to a decline in the vehicular death rate, the infant mortality rate and the rate of infectious disease.

The 16th annual survey, "America's Health Rankings," released earlier this month, shows that Oregon went from the 21st healthiest state to the 18th.

Oregon's infant death rate dropped to 5.7 per 1,000 live births in 2005 from 9.9 per 1,000 in 1990.

Motor vehicle deaths dipped to 1.3 per 100 million miles driven from 1.5 in 2004.

The report also showed that infectious diseases declined sharply, to 16 cases per 100,000 population this year from 92.8 in 1990.

But Dr. Paul Cieslak,

manager of Oregon's communicable disease program, says the figures could be misleading because they include only AIDS, tuberculosis and hepatitis.

Other infectious diseases, notably gonorrhea and chlamydia, have gone up substantially, he said.

Tom Eckstein, a principal in Arundel Street Consulting of St. Paul, Minn., said the health indicators were chosen to provide a level playing field to permit accurate comparisons among states.

In the 2005 results, Minnesota ranked as the nation's healthiest state followed by Vermont and New Hampshire.

At the bottom of the list was Mississippi, preceded by Louisiana and Tennessee.

The survey, prepared by the United Health Founda-

tion, the American Public Health Association and Partnership for Prevention, cited a fourth improvement for Oregon — a reduction in the percentage of children in poverty.

According to the report, poverty among Oregonians younger than 18 declined from 20.1 percent in 2004 to 15.6 percent this year.

Those figures are being questioned, though, by an Oregon group that tracks child welfare issues.

Cathy Kaufmann, research and policy associate with Children First for Oregon, says the percentage of impoverished children actually went up during the past year.

Kaufmann said the latest U.S. Census Bureau data show that childhood poverty increased to 19.1 percent in 2005 from 17.5 percent in 2004.