EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

OVERVIEW

The health of women, infants and children is fundamental to the health of our communities. Babies born to healthy mothers and families start off on a promising path to health that has the potential to last a lifetime. As a child grows up, experiences with the health care system and other environmental factors contribute to a child’s continued health and well-being. From recommended health care services like vaccines and well-child visits, to the protective effects of a safe home life and neighborhood, a child’s health is influenced by numerous factors and the effects – either positive or otherwise – can last into adulthood.

The United Health Foundation has long recognized the important interconnectivity among the health of women, infants and children and the lasting impact the health of these populations can have on the health of our communities. America’s Health Rankings® Health of Women and Children Report reflects the Foundation’s commitment to improving their health by providing data-driven insights on both opportunities and challenges for improving health and building healthier communities.

This report is one of the most comprehensive assessments to date of the health of women, infants and children at the national and state levels. It takes a new approach of combining health indicators across three populations to offer a holistic picture of health.

Sixty measures of health and well-being are included in the rankings, all selected by an advisory steering group of experts in the field of women’s and children’s health. Data were incorporated from 18 individual sources to create a wide-ranging snapshot of health. The report shines light on the strengths and challenges faced by the nation and offers state-level data for community leaders, public health officials and policymakers to use as a roadmap to improve the health of women and children within their states.
THE HEALTHIEST STATES FOR WOMEN AND CHILDREN

The report ranked each state across 60 measures related to the health of women, children and infants to provide a holistic view of how each state stacks up against others.

The report finds that the Northeast excels in the health of women and children, with Massachusetts ranked the highest and Vermont (2) and New Hampshire (3) rounding out the top three. Mississippi is ranked as the state with the greatest health challenges, followed by Arkansas (49) and Louisiana (48).

THE REPORT ALSO RANKS THE HEALTH OF EACH POPULATION INDIVIDUALLY

• For women, Massachusetts, Minnesota and Vermont fare best; Mississippi, Louisiana and Texas have the greatest opportunity for improvement.
• On infant health, New Hampshire, Utah and Vermont are strongest; Mississippi, Arkansas and Georgia face the greatest challenges.
• When it comes to the health of children, Massachusetts, Connecticut and New Hampshire rank at the top; Mississippi, Arizona and Nevada have more work to do.
NOTABLE DIFFERENCES IN THE HEALTH OF WOMEN AND CHILDREN EXIST ACROSS – AND OFTEN EVEN WITHIN – STATES

The report points out that a high or low ranking for one population doesn’t guarantee that other populations will be ranked the same. In fact, it finds that some states rank high for the health of infants relative to other states, while their ranks for women and children may be lower, or vice versa. For example:

- Alaska, Arizona and Idaho score above average for the health of infants, but rank below average for the health of women and children.
- Child health ranks below average in Montana and Oregon, but these two states perform better than the national average when it comes to the health of women and infants.

RANKINGS

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<th>STATE</th>
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The report also looks at smoking across four measures (smoking among women, smoking during pregnancy, youth tobacco use and household smoke exposure for children), and finds that while most states perform similarly across the measures, some states are outliers. For example, smoking during pregnancy is much lower than expected in certain states, given the prevalence of smoking among women. The report also finds large differences among states when it comes to smoking during pregnancy, with the rate in West Virginia 17 times greater than the rate in Connecticut.

**NATION SEES SUCCESSES IN UPTAKE OF CLINICAL PREVENTIVE SERVICES FOR CHILDREN, BUT OPPORTUNITIES REMAIN TO IMPROVE CHILDREN’S ENVIRONMENTS**

The report illuminates national successes in children’s health as well as notable challenges facing the country as a whole. One example of a national success can be found in children’s use of preventive services, where the report finds the following:

- Nine out of ten babies and eight out of ten adolescents are receiving their recommended check-ups.
- Within the recommended series of early childhood vaccines, more than 90% of children are receiving vaccinations for polio (93%), measles (MMR) (92%), Hepatitis B (92%) and chicken pox (91%).

These preventive services are critically important to the health of a child, but also important are the factors that impact a child in his/her home and neighborhood. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), adverse experiences in childhood increase the likelihood of developing chronic health conditions and engaging in unhealthy behaviors down the road. Further, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) notes that living in a supportive neighborhood can improve a child’s long-term social and emotional health.

Across these measures, the report finds that three-quarters of children live in supportive neighborhoods where people look out for each other’s well-being.
However, the report also finds that a high percentage of children – nearly 1 in 4 – have two or more adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) before their 18th birthdays, and notes that these experiences can have lasting negative impacts on health.

**NEARLY 1 IN 4 CHILDREN (16.4 MILLION) HAVE MULTIPLE ADVERSE CHILDHOOD EXPERIENCES BEFORE REACHING THEIR 18TH BIRTHDAY.**

**ACCORDING TO CDC, CHILDREN EXPERIENCING A HIGHER NUMBER OF ADVERSE CHILDHOOD EXPERIENCES IN THEIR HOME ENVIRONMENT ARE MORE LIKELY TO DEVELOP CHRONIC HEALTH CONDITIONS AND ENGAGE IN UNHEALTHY BEHAVIORS.**

**RACIAL DISPARITIES PERSIST IN INFANT AND CHILD MORTALITY**

The report also finds that racial and ethnic disparities continue in the U.S. across mortality measures. Strickingly, infant mortality is 2.1 times higher for blacks than whites and child mortality is 1.5 times higher for blacks than whites. However, other mortality measures, such as teen suicide and drug deaths, are more prevalent among whites than other racial groups.

**SUPPORTING PUBLIC HEALTH EFFORTS FOR WOMEN AND CHILDREN**

Understanding the health of women, infants and children in America will help improve the nation’s public health efforts to address areas where the country is facing challenges and further promote successful programs. The report builds on United Health Foundation’s work to support better health and encourages others to join in building healthier communities.

1 Indicator that a child has experienced the following: socioeconomic hardship, divorce/parental separation, lived with someone who had an alcohol or drug problem, victim or witness of neighborhood violence, lived with someone who was mentally ill or suicidal, domestic violence witness, parent served time in jail, treated or judged unfairly due to race/ethnicity, or death of parent.

2 Supportive neighborhood is defined by the percentage of children aged 0 to 17 whose parents report their child is “usually” or “always” safe in their community and neighborhood and they “strongly agree” or “somewhat agree” with at least three of the following: In my neighborhood people help each other out, we watch out for each other’s children, there are people I can count on in this neighborhood, there are trusted adults nearby to help my child if they got hurt or scared while playing outside.

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1 https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/acestudy/about_ace.html
2 http://www.hhs.gov/ash/oah/adolescent-health-topics/americas-adolescents/picture.html
To read the full version of America’s Health Rankings® Health of Women and Children or explore more research from America’s Health Rankings®, visit www.americashealthrankings.org

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