

America's Children 2015 Audio Podcast

Recorded July 8, 2015

Tom Snyder: Welcome to this podcast on [*America's Children 2015*](#), a new statistical report that describes the well-being of our nation's children. The report covers a wide range of topics relevant to children today, including family and social environment, economic circumstances, health, physical environment and safety, education, and behavior. This annual report is produced by the Forum on Child and Family Statistics, a Federal interagency group of experts on child-related data. My name is Tom Snyder, and I am from the National Center for Education Statistics.

This year's report shows some notable improvements in the condition of children. There has been a decline in the number of babies born prematurely. Premature birth has been associated with higher rates of health impairments, so this is a very positive development. Also, there has been a recent decrease in the percentage of children with asthma. The poverty rate for children has declined and high school completion rates have increased, particularly for Hispanic students. On the other hand, some aspects have not improved. The percentage of children experiencing a major depressive episode has continued to increase over the past several years.

In addition to these and many other important findings, this year's report contains a [special feature on health care quality](#). With me is one of the lead authors of this special section, Denise Dougherty, Senior Advisor for Child Health and Quality Improvement at the Federal Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality, or AHRQ.

Denise, tell us about the special feature on health care quality.

Denise Dougherty: Thanks, Tom. The *America's Children* reports have always included some measures of health care among children in the U.S. We need to monitor health care for children and adolescents because evidence suggests that differences in the quality of health care that a child receives can contribute to differences in his or her health, both immediately and throughout their lives. On an ongoing basis, the report monitors such measures as having a usual source of

health care, health insurance status, immunizations, and having had a dental visit in the previous year. However, the Forum felt that it would be informative to look more closely at several other aspects of the quality and content of health care for children and adolescents.

So, this year we developed a special feature to further explore some important domains of health care quality, including timeliness and effectiveness of health care, as well as access to health care.

The special feature expands our view of health care quality, and we are very excited about it at the Forum. In addition, just a few days ago, my agency, AHRQ, released a [chartbook on healthy living](#), which includes a section on maternal and child health care. This chartbook is part of AHRQ's 2014 National Healthcare Quality and Disparities Report. The full Quality and Disparities Report and the chartbook, which contains additional children's health care quality measures, can be found at [AHRQ's website](#). We are hopeful that interested readers and listeners will look at both reports!

For the *America's Children* special feature, we focused on four measures. The first measure examines the percentage of children and adolescents that received a well-visit with a doctor or another clinician in the previous year. The second measure examines the percentage of children ages 3–5 that have received vision screening. The third measure focuses on asthma, which is one of the most prevalent chronic diseases among children. It examines the extent to which children with asthma and their parents have received asthma management plans. The fourth measure focuses on access to care and looks at the percentage of children that were unable to get or were delayed in getting needed medical or dental care, or prescription drugs.

Tom Snyder: Why were these particular measures chosen for the special feature?

Denise Dougherty: Well, Tom, there are hundreds of existing health care quality measures. No single measure, or even a group of measures, can fully describe the quality of health care for children in the United States because there are so many aspects to health care that can vary in quality. So we chose measures that are of particular interest and importance. At well-visits, for

example, children receive preventive care and health promotion services, and health care providers have the opportunity to identify and address a host of problems that might occur in a child's or adolescent's life. And the percentage of children who are unable to receive or are delayed in receiving medical care, dental care, or prescription drugs is a fairly direct measure of access to care, that compares to, say, health insurance coverage, which, while obviously important, is more upstream in terms of actually getting needed care.

Tom Snyder: Denise, you have a longstanding involvement with promoting health care quality topics among Federal colleagues at AHRQ and across the statistical community. I'm sure the inclusion of these data in the *America's Children* report have special meaning for you. Is there anything else you want to tell us about the special feature?

Denise Dougherty: Well, I hope it comes to the attention of the many people interested in health care quality for children and adolescents, including many people in Federal, state, and local government, academic institutions, and the health care sector, in addition to children and their families. We hope this special feature highlights some of the salient issues and some of the great work that is being done and also serves as a springboard for further work in this area.

Tom Snyder: Thanks, Denise. In part 2 of our podcast, Dr. Alan Simon from the National Center for Health Statistics will talk to us about the main findings of the special feature on health care quality. The full report and other related findings about our nation's children are available at childstats.gov.

Denise, I understand you are retiring. You have been a very engaged and supportive Forum member since you joined us in 2000. I would like to take this time to thank you for your work on the *America's Children* report series and for your many other activities in Federal service. On behalf of the Forum, we wish you all the very best in your retirement.

Denise Dougherty: Thanks so much, Tom. Being a Forum member has been one of the most enjoyable parts of Federal service for me.

Tom Snyder: Stay tuned for part 2 of our podcast.

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Tom Snyder: Welcome to part 2 of our podcast on [America's Children](#), a new statistical report on the well-being of our nation's children. This annual report is produced by the Forum on Child and Family Statistics, a Federal interagency group that presents data on children, adolescents, and their families. My name is Tom Snyder, and I am from the National Center for Education Statistics. In addition to a range of findings on many factors affecting our nation's children, the 2015 report contains a [special feature on health care quality](#). An expert on this topic, Dr. Alan Simon from the National Center for Health Statistics, is with us to explain some of the important findings from this special feature.

Alan, what are the main findings from the special feature on health care quality?

Alan Simon: Well, overall, each of the four measures described in this special feature has improved over time. The percentage of children receiving a well-visit in the past year increased from 73 percent in 1997 to 83 percent in 2013. The percentage of 3- to 5-year-olds that had ever received a vision screening increased from 54 percent in 2002 to 61 percent in 2012. The percentage of children with asthma that had ever received an asthma management plan increased from 41 percent in 2002 to 51 percent in 2013. And finally, the percentage of children who were unable to receive or who were delayed in receiving needed medical care, dental care, or prescription drugs declined from 6 percent in 2002 to 4 percent in 2012.

However, there is still room for further improvement. For example, only about half of children with asthma have ever received an asthma management plan. An asthma management plan is a written document that describes self-management strategies that patients and families can use to help prevent asthma attacks and give them guidance on what to do in the event of an asthma attack.

Also, for some measures, there were subpopulations that did not show improvement. For example, the percentage of uninsured children that had received a well-visit in the past year has remained about the same between 1997 and 2013. Similarly, the percentage of uninsured children ages 3–5 that had received vision screening was about the same in 2002 as it was in 2012.

Tom Snyder: Alan, can you tell us about which groups of children are receiving worse health care quality and access to care?

Alan Simon: Sure. For the measures we examined, the data show that uninsured children generally experience lower quality of health care and worse access to care. In 2013, only 56 percent of uninsured children had received a well-visit in the past year, which was lower than the 85 percent for both children with private and public insurance. Also, in 2012, 7 percent of uninsured children had been unable to receive or were delayed in receiving needed medical care, dental care, or prescription drugs, which was higher than the 4 percent for children with both public and private insurance. The percentage of children who had received a vision check was also lower among the uninsured.

In terms of well-visits, a lower percentage of adolescents had received a well-visit in the previous year than younger children, and children in families with lower income levels were less likely to have received a well-visit in the previous year as well. This percentage was also lower for Hispanic children than for both non-Hispanic black and non-Hispanic white children.

We also see some disparities for children by type of health insurance coverage. For example, in 2013 among children with asthma, a lower percentage of children with public insurance than private insurance had received an asthma action plan.

Tom Snyder: Thanks, Alan, for telling us about these important findings on health care quality. The full report, *America's Children*, covers a range of important topics including family and social environment, economic circumstances, health, physical environment and safety, education,

and behavior. The full report and other related findings about our nation's children are available at childstats.gov.

Thanks for joining us!