



UNDER EMBARGO until Monday, June 17 at 12:01 a.m. ET

Contact: Thale Dillon (thale.dillon@umontana.edu) 406-243-2780

MONTANA SEES SIGNIFICANT REDUCTION IN CHILD AND YOUTH DEATHS, BUT REMAINS THE FOURTH-WORST FOR TEENS ABUSING ALCOHOL OR DRUGS

30th KIDS COUNT® Data Book provides the most comprehensive annual report on child well-being in the United States.

MISSOULA, Montana — Montana ranked 22nd among states for overall child well-being but remains near the bottom (44th) when it comes to child health, according to the 30th edition of the *KIDS COUNT® Data Book* released today by the Annie E. Casey Foundation. Child and youth deaths have decreased by 40 percent since 2010—the greatest reduction among states, improving Montana’s ranking from 50th to 22nd. The percentage of Montana teens who abuse alcohol or drugs also dropped significantly over the same period, from 10 percent of youth, to 6 percent, but this rate is still higher than for almost every other state in the nation.

“Montana’s persistently low health rankings are what holds us back in terms of overall child well-being,” said Thale Dillon, director of Montana KIDS COUNT at the Bureau of Business and Economic Research at the University of Montana.

Additionally, despite the great gains Montana has made in access to health insurance, the state still ranks 38th in the nation.

Montana has followed a national trend of great reductions in teen birth rates, although the rate of improvement is below the national average. The percentage of babies born at low birth weight, however, is increasing. At 8.0 percent, the rate of low-birth weight babies ranks Montana 21st among states.

The *KIDS COUNT Data Book* shows how essential accurate data is to sound policy making. The 2010 census missed 2.2 million kids, and the upcoming count may miss even more if young children are not a priority. The stakes are high: 55 major federal programs, including Head Start and the Children’s Health Insurance Program, allocate more than \$800 billion each year based on census data.

The annual *KIDS COUNT Data Book* from the Annie E. Casey Foundation uses 16 indicators to rank each state across four domains — health, education, economic well-being, and family and community — as an assessment of child well-being. Montana ranks:

- 19th in economic well-being. While Montana’s ranking in this domain has dropped two spots since last year, the state has still seen solid drops in child poverty, children living in households with a high housing cost burden, and the percentage of teens who are not in school and not working.

- 20th in education. This ranking is the same as last year's. While there has been a great reduction in the percentage of high school students not graduating on time, there are actually more children ages 3 and 4 who are not in preschool, and the number of 8th graders who are not proficient in math has increased by 13 percent.
- Montana ranks 44th in health, having improved its ranking in the health domain by two spots due to great improvements in two areas. The rate of child and teen deaths is down 40 percent since 2010, and the percentage children who do not have health insurance coverage has dropped by 54 percent since 2010. Montana still ranks 22nd and 38th, respectively, in these two areas.
- Montana ranks 11th in the family and community domain. This is where Montana is performing the best. Due to a 38 percent drop in children who live in families where the household head does not have a high school diploma, Montana now ranks 2nd among states in this indicator. Further, the children who live in single-parent households indicator improved slightly, ranking Montana 5th nationwide.

The Casey Foundation points to areas of tremendous improvement in children's lives, including access to health care, improved graduation rates and reduced teen childbearing, and draws a direct line to policies that support these successes. Especially as Montana's child population is expanding, there are steps that policymakers should take to help all children thrive. The Casey Foundation encourages actions that:

- *Maintain the programs that make and keep kids healthy.* Passing the Medicaid expansion went a long way in ensuring our downward trend in children without health insurance continues.
- *Provide the tools proven to help families lift themselves up economically.* Federal and state earned income tax credits (EITC) and child tax credit programs mean working parents can use more of their take-home pay to meet their children's needs. Montana currently does not have an earned income tax credit.
- *Address ethnic and racial inequalities.* The averages of child well-being mask the reality that black and brown children still face a greater number of obstacles, both in Montana and in the United States.
- *Count all kids.* Ensure that the 2020 census counts all children, including those who historically have been under-counted: children under age 5 and children in hard-to-count areas, such as American Indian reservations and rural areas.

The *2019 KIDS COUNT® Data Book* is the 30th edition of an annual data study based on U.S. census information and other publicly available data, representing all 50 states, the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico.

Release Information

The *2019 KIDS COUNT® Data Book* will be available June 17 at 12:01 a.m. EDT at www.aecf.org. Additional information is available at www.aecf.org/databook. Journalists interested in creating maps,

graphs and rankings in stories about the *Data Book* can use the KIDS COUNT® Data Center at datacenter.kidscount.org.

About Montana KIDS COUNT

Montana KIDS COUNT's mission is to improve child and family well-being in our state by disseminating data and research that will advance awareness of challenges and opportunities. We make this information available to child advocates, policymakers and Montana citizens to encourage informed and responsible decision-making. Montana KIDS COUNT is part of a state-by-state project of the Annie E. Casey Foundation to track the well-being of children in the United States. For more information, visit www.montanakidscount.org.

About the Annie E. Casey Foundation

The Annie E. Casey Foundation creates a brighter future for the nation's children by developing solutions to strengthen families, build paths to economic opportunity and transform struggling communities into safer and healthier places to live, work and grow. For more information, visit: www.aefc.org.