



United States  
General Accounting Office  
Washington, D.C. 20548



Health, Education and Human Services Division

B-276884

May 27, 1997

The Honorable Daniel Patrick Moynihan  
Ranking Minority Member  
Committee on Finance  
United States Senate

Subject: Uninsured Children: Estimates of Citizenship and Immigration Status  
in 1995

Dear Senator Moynihan:

The number of uninsured children under 18 years old has grown 20 percent since 1987, reaching 9.8 million in 1995, as the percentage of children with private health insurance coverage declined. In response to concern about children left without coverage, this Congress has introduced several proposals to expand health insurance for children. Some members of the Congress, however, may prefer to reserve any proposed benefits for citizens or certain categories of legal residents. To help the Committee with its deliberations on approaches to insuring children, you asked us to provide you with information on the citizenship and immigration status of uninsured children under 18 years old.

To develop this information, we used data from the March 1996 Bureau of the Census' Current Population Survey (CPS), which includes information on health insurance coverage during 1995. The CPS reports children as uninsured if they had no reported source of public or private health insurance at any time during 1995. We matched records for children under 18 years old with records for one of their parents (or other relative if no parent record matched) aged 18 to 64 years old to report on both uninsured children and at least one of their parents. We are reporting birth and naturalization status on only those children whose records we matched with their parents' records. (See enclosure I for more information on the CPS and our methodology.) The numbers and percentages are estimates and depend upon parents' or other household members' self-reporting of household members' birth, citizenship, and insurance status. We performed our work in April 1997 in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards.

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According to U.S. law, people may be citizens due to birth or naturalization. People born in the United States are U.S. citizens, no matter what the immigration or residency status of their parents.<sup>1</sup> People who are born abroad of U.S. citizens are also U.S. citizens. In addition, people born in Puerto Rico and these outlying areas—Guam, the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, and the Virgin Islands—are citizens. People born in American Samoa are citizens if one of their parents is a citizen and that parent has been physically present in the United States or an outlying possession for at least 1 year before the birth of the child. Foreign-born people may enter the United States legally as nonimmigrants or immigrants. Generally, nonimmigrants stay here temporarily, while immigrants reside here permanently and may apply for citizenship after 5 years of U.S. residence. Some foreign-born people enter or live in the United States illegally.

The CPS has no information on whether a person is in the country legally or illegally. The survey does classify individuals as (1) native, born in the United States; (2) native, born in Puerto Rico or U.S. outlying areas; (3) native, born abroad of a U.S. parent; (4) foreign born, U.S. citizen by naturalization; and (5) foreign born and not a naturalized U.S. citizen. According to one researcher familiar with the CPS and immigrant matters, the CPS reports more foreign-born people and more foreign-born naturalized citizens than can be accounted for through legal immigration and naturalization data from the Immigration and Naturalization Service.

Our analysis of the CPS showed the following for 1995:

- Among uninsured children, almost 9 out of 10 children were born in the United States. Most of the rest were foreign-born noncitizen residents. (See enclosure II.)
- Although foreign-born noncitizen children constituted only 3.3 percent of U.S. children in 1995, they accounted for over 9 percent of all uninsured children. Almost 37 percent of foreign-born noncitizen children were uninsured in 1995—about 847,000 children. In comparison, only 12.5 percent of U.S.-born children were uninsured—but this group numbers over 8,250,000 children. (See enclosure II.)
- A parent of an uninsured child was more likely to be foreign born than were his or her children. Almost 3 out of 10 of the parents who matched with uninsured children were foreign born. Four-fifths of these foreign-born parents were not citizens. (See enclosure III.)

For more detail, see attached tables and figures in enclosures II and III.

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<sup>1</sup>Some minor exceptions exist, such as children of diplomats.

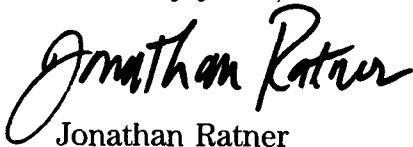
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Because this information is based on data and procedures used in the previous GAO reports listed at the end of this letter, we did not seek agency comments on a draft of this correspondence.

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We will make this correspondence available to others on request. Please contact me at (202) 512-7107 if you or your staff have any questions. The information in this letter was prepared by Michael Gutowski, Sheila Avruch, and Paula Bonin.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jonathan Ratner". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, prominent initial "J".

Jonathan Ratner  
Associate Director, Health Financing and Systems Issues

Enclosures

## METHODOLOGY

To examine insurance coverage and birth and immigration status of children and a parent, we analyzed the Bureau of the Census' Current Population Survey (CPS) for March 1996, which reported on insurance status in 1995. The CPS is the source of official government statistics on employment and unemployment. An important secondary purpose of the survey is to collect demographic information on the U.S. population, including age, sex, race, marital status, educational attainment, and family structure. The CPS conducted every March also collects additional information on work experience, income, noncash benefits, and health insurance coverage of each household member during the previous year.

The CPS sample is based on the civilian, noninstitutionalized population of the United States. It includes about 48,000 households with approximately 94,000 people 15 years old and older and approximately 28,000 children under 15 years old. It also includes Armed Forces members living in households with civilians either on or off base. The households sampled by the CPS are scientifically selected on the basis of area of residence to represent the United States as a whole, individual states, and other specified areas. Since the CPS is based on a sample of the U.S. population, weights are used to compute estimates for the total population. The weights are computed on the basis of information from the decennial censuses.

We have used the CPS for several years to analyze insurance coverage and other demographic characteristics of U.S. children and their parents.<sup>2</sup> The CPS contains records for households, families within a household, and persons within families. The records are linked so that an individual's record can be related to other family or household members' records.

To report on parents of children under age 18, we matched each child's record with the record of a parent or other relative in a parental role aged 18 to 64 in the same household. Every child's record did not match with a parent or other relative's record. Of the estimated 9.8 million uninsured children, we matched records from the CPS sample that represent 9.2 million (94 percent of the children). For birth and naturalization status of uninsured children, we are only reporting on those children whose records we matched with their parents' records.

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<sup>2</sup>Many of the related GAO reports at the end of this letter have information from the CPS--some from previous years. For example, see Health Insurance for Children: Private Insurance Coverage Continues to Deteriorate (GAO/HEHS-96-129, June 17, 1996) and Health Insurance for Children: Many Remain Uninsured Despite Medicaid Expansion (GAO/HEHS-95-175, July 19, 1995).

DATA ON ESTIMATED BIRTH, CITIZENSHIP,  
AND NATURALIZATION STATUS OF CHILDREN

Figure II.1: Estimated Birth and Citizenship Status of All U.S. Children and Uninsured Children, 1995

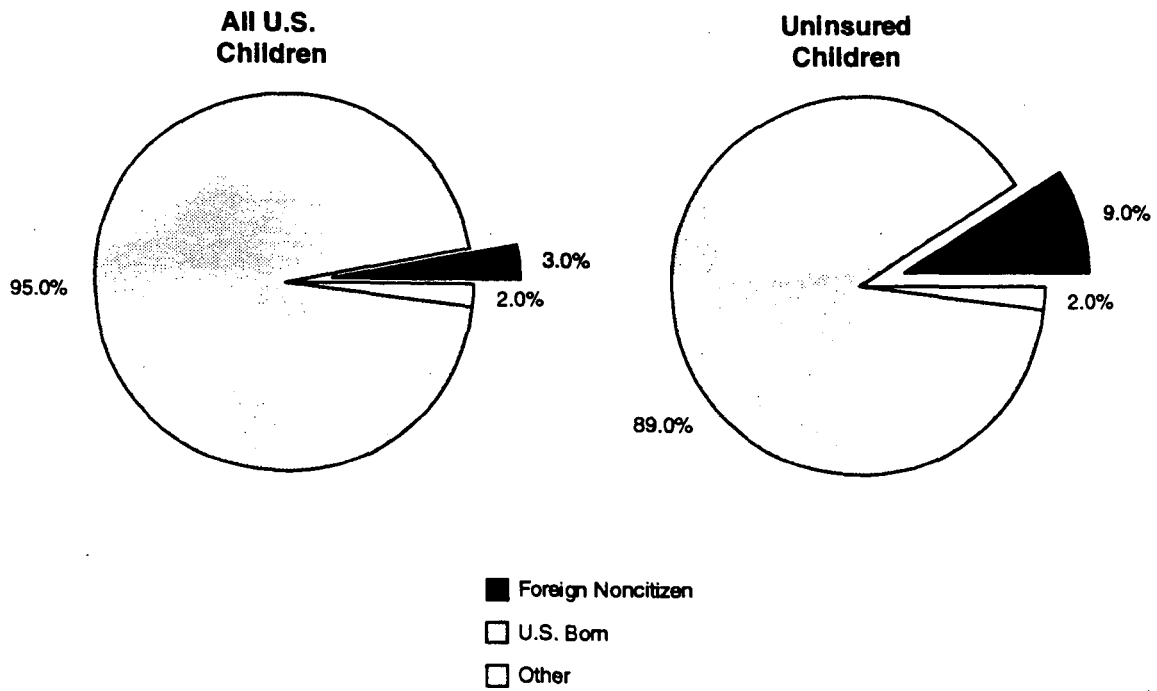


Figure II.2: Percentage of Children Who Are Uninsured Within Each Birth and Naturalization Status, 1995

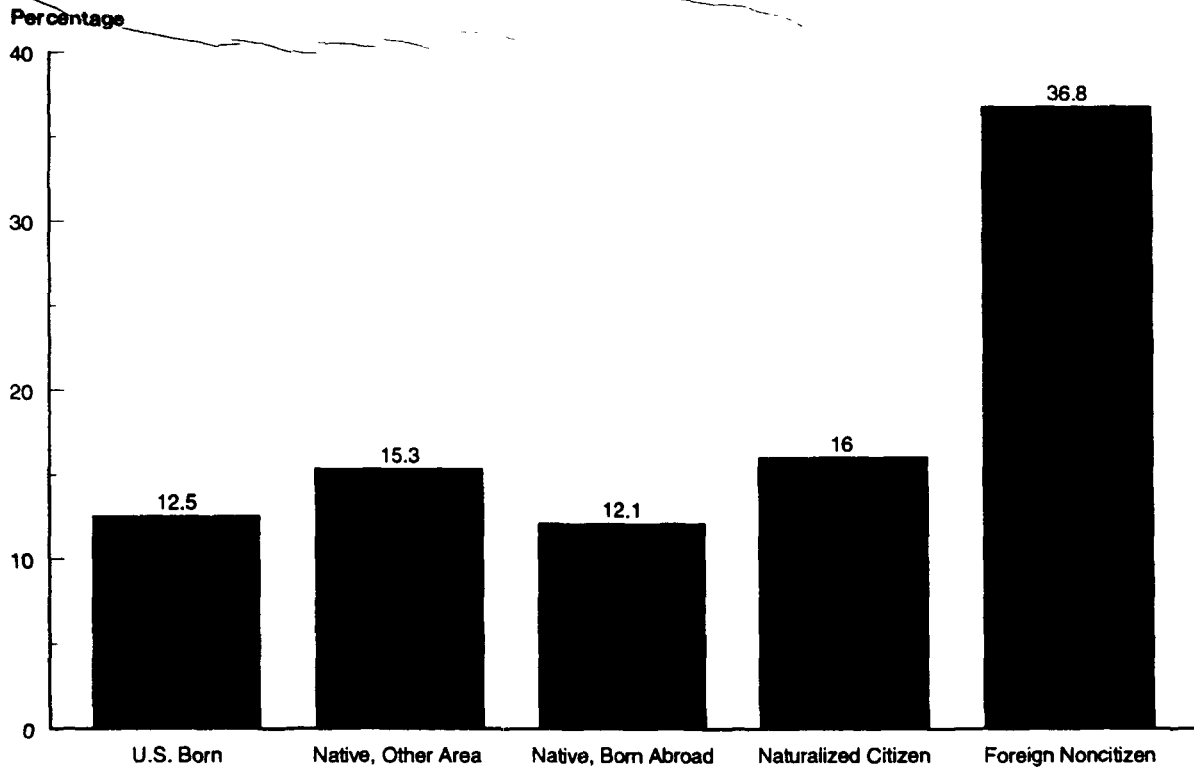


Table II.1: Estimated Birth and Citizenship Status of All U.S. Children and Uninsured Children, 1995

	All U.S. children		Uninsured children	
	Number in thousands	Percent	Number in thousands	Percent
U.S. born	66,213	95.2	8,250	89.3
Native, Puerto Rico or U.S. outlying area	183	0.3	28	0.3
Native, born abroad of U.S. parent	552	0.8	67	0.7
Foreign-born naturalized citizen	320	0.5	51	0.6
Foreign-born noncitizen	2,299	3.3	847	9.2
<b>Total</b>	<b>69,568</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>9,243</b>	<b>100</b>

Notes: Numbers or percents may not add due to rounding.

These estimates are based on parents' or other household members' report of children's birth, citizenship, and health insurance status in the Mar. 1996 Current Population Survey.

The figures represent 98 percent of the estimated 71.148 million children aged 0 to 17 years old and 94 percent of the estimated 9.795 million uninsured children aged 0 to 17 years old and are based on those children in the sample whose records matched with the record of a parent aged 18 to 64 years old or (in the absence of such a parent) other relative aged 18 to 64 years old.

Table III.1: Estimated Birth and Citizenship Status of a Parent Who Matched With Uninsured Children, 1995

	Number in thousands	Percent
U.S. born	6,412	69.4
Native, Puerto Rico, or U.S. outlying area	83	0.9
Native, born abroad of U.S. parent	100	1.1
Foreign-born naturalized citizen	551	6.0
Foreign-born noncitizen	2,097	22.7
<b>Total</b>	<b>9,243</b>	<b>100</b>

Notes: Numbers or percents may not add due to rounding.

These estimates are based on parents' or other household members' report of household members' birth, and citizenship status, and children's health insurance status in the Mar. 1996 Current Population Survey.

These figures represent a parent for 94 percent of the estimated 9.795 million uninsured children aged 0 to 17 years old. They represent a parent for each of those uninsured children whose records matched with the record of a parent aged 18 to 64 years old or (in the absence of a parent) other relative aged 18 to 64 years old. Information is reported on one parent (or other relative, in the absence of a parent) who matched with each child—the first parent or relative who matched with the child.



## RELATED GAO PRODUCTS

Employment-Based Health Insurance: Costs Increase and Family Coverage Decreases (GAO/HEHS-97-35, Feb. 24, 1997).

Children's Health Insurance 1995 (GAO/HEHS-97-68R, Feb. 19, 1997).

Children's Health Insurance Programs, 1996 (GAO/HEHS-97-40R, Dec. 3, 1996).

Medicaid and Uninsured Children, 1994 (GAO/HEHS-96-174R, July 9, 1996).

Health Insurance for Children: Private Insurance Coverage Continues to Deteriorate (GAO/HEHS-96-129, June 17, 1996).

Health Insurance for Children: State and Private Programs Create New Strategies to Insure Children (GAO/HEHS-96-35, Jan. 18, 1996).

Medicaid and Children's Insurance (GAO/HEHS-96-50R, Oct. 20, 1995).

Health Insurance for Children: Many Remain Uninsured Despite Medicaid Expansion (GAO/HEHS-95-175, July 19, 1995).

Uninsured and Children on Medicaid (GAO/HEHS-95-83R, Feb. 14, 1995).

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