

# America's Children: Key National Indicators of Well-Being 2003



America's Children:  
Key National Indicators  
of Well-Being 2003



# Federal Interagency Forum on Child and Family Statistics

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The Federal Interagency Forum on Child and Family Statistics was founded in 1994. Executive Order No. 13045 formally established it in April 1997 to foster coordination and collaboration in the collection and reporting of Federal data on children and families. Members of the Forum as of Spring 2003 are listed below.

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Katherine K. Wallman  
Chief Statistician

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## Foreword

**I**n 1994, the Office of Management and Budget joined with six other Federal agencies to create the Interagency Forum on Child and Family Statistics. Formally established in April 1997 through Executive Order No. 13045, the Forum was called upon to develop priorities for collecting enhanced data on children and youth, improve the reporting and dissemination of information on the status of children to the policy community and the general public, and produce more complete data on children at the State and local levels. The Forum, which now has participants from 20 Federal agencies as well as partners in private research organizations, fosters coordination, collaboration, and integration of Federal efforts to collect and report data on conditions and trends for children and families.

*America's Children: Key National Indicators of Well-Being, 2003* is the seventh report in an annual series prepared by the Forum agencies. As in past years, readers will find here an accessible compendium of indicators—drawn from the most reliable official statistics—illustrative of both the promises and the difficulties confronting our Nation's young people. The report presents 25 key indicators on important aspects of children's lives. These indicators are easy to understand by broad audiences, objectively based on substantial research connecting them to reliable data on child well-being, balanced so that no single area of children's lives dominates the report, measured regularly so that they can be updated to show trends over time, and representative of large segments of the population rather than one particular group. The report also presents data on nine contextual measures that describe changes in the characteristics of the population as well as in children's family settings and living arrangements.

As has been the case in previous volumes, this report includes a Population and Family Characteristics section that provides key contextual measures, followed by sections that present key indicators in four domains—Economic Security, Health, Behavior and Social Environment, and Education. This year's report reflects several significant improvements. First, the section on Health Indicators has been expanded to include the percentage of overweight children as a regular key indicator. Second, there are two new measures that will be included each year in the Population and Family Characteristics section—the percentage of children living with at least one parent who was foreign-born and the percentage of children being exposed to secondhand smoke. Third, users of past volumes of *America's Children* will see that the

Summary List of Indicators has been expanded to include three Population and Family Characteristics measures. And, finally, this year's special feature highlights changes in the lives of America's children for nine key indicators, based on 1990 and 2000 decennial census data for all 50 States and the District of Columbia. The Forum has long recognized the importance of state-level data and welcomes this opportunity to provide new information to our readers.

Each volume of *America's Children* highlights critical data gaps and challenges Federal statistical agencies to do better. Forum agencies are meeting that challenge by working to provide more comprehensive and consistent information on the condition and progress of our Nation's children. Since the last report, Forum agencies have continued efforts to strengthen some indicators and to close critical data gaps, particularly in areas such as family structure and formation, the mental health of children, and positive behaviors associated with improved child development.

The value of the *America's Children* reports and the extraordinary cooperation they represent reflect the Forum's innovative, determined spirit to advance our understanding of where our children are today and what may be needed to bring them a better tomorrow. The Forum agencies should be congratulated once again this year for joining together to address their common goals: developing a truly comprehensive set of indicators on the well-being of America's children and ensuring that this information is readily accessible in both content and format. Their accomplishments reflect the dedication of the Forum agency staff members who coordinate the assessment of data needs, evaluate strategies to make data presentations more consistent, and work together to produce important publications and provide these products on the Forum's website: <http://childstats.gov>. Last but not least, none of this work would be possible without the continued cooperation of millions of American citizens who willingly provide the data that are summarized and analyzed by staff in the Federal agencies.

We invite you to suggest ways in which we can enhance this annual portrait of the Nation's most valuable resource: its children. I applaud the Forum's collaborative efforts in producing this seventh annual report and hope that our compendium will continue to be useful in your work.

**Katherine K. Wallman**  
*Chief Statistician*  
*Office of Management and Budget*

## Acknowledgments

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**T**his report reflects the commitment and involvement of the members of the Federal Interagency Forum on Child and Family Statistics. It was prepared by the Writing Subcommittee of the Reporting Committee of the Forum. This year, the subcommittee was chaired by Kristin Smith, U.S. Census Bureau. Other committee members included Julia Rhodes and John Kiely, National Center for Health Statistics; Dawn Aldridge, Food and Nutrition Service; David Johnson, Bureau of Labor Statistics; Patrick Rooney, National Center for Education Statistics; Janet Chiancone, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention; Daniel Axelrad and Edward Chu, Environmental Protection Agency; and Kathy Nelson, Department of Housing and Urban Development.

The Reporting Committee of the Forum, chaired by Kristin Smith, guided the development of the new indicators. Members of the Reporting Committee not represented on the Writing Subcommittee included Linda Gordon, Bureau of Citizenship and Immigration Services; Laura Montgomery, Gloria Simpson, and Barbara Foley Wilson, National Center for Health Statistics; Robert Kominski, U.S. Census Bureau; Jeff Evans, National Institute of Child Health and Human Development; Meredith Kelsey, Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation, Department of Health and Human Services; Woodie Kessel, Office of Disease Prevention and Health Promotion; Zahid Khawaja, National Highway Traffic Safety Administration; Russ Scarato and Stella Yu, Maternal and Child Health Bureau; and Susan Schechter, Office of Management and Budget.

Other staff members of the Forum agencies provided data, developed indicators, or wrote parts of the report. They include Joseph Dalaker, Jason Fields, Arjun Adlakha, Shailesh Bhandari, Julia Overturf, Gregg Robinson, and Kirsten West, U.S. Census Bureau; Patsy Klaus and Michael Rand, Bureau of Justice Statistics; Howard Hayghe, Rowena Johnson, and Robert McIntire, Bureau of Labor Statistics; Lawrence Barker, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention; Peter Basiotis, Mark Lino, and Andrea Carlson, Center for Nutrition Policy and Promotion; Chris Chapman, National Center for Education Statistics; Robin Cohen, Cathy Duran, Lois Fingerhut, Donna Hoyert, and Stephanie Ventura, National Center for Health Statistics; Barbara Allen-Hagen, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention; James Colliver, National Institute on Drug Abuse; and Mark Nord, Economic Research Service.

Other individuals who assisted with the report included Yupin Bae, Pinkerton Computer Consultants, Inc.; and DeeAnn Brimhall and Linda Shafer, Education Statistics Services Institute.

Westat, in support of the U.S. Census Bureau, assisted the committee in producing the report. Janice Kociol coordinated and managed the production of the report, including preparing files for agency updates and providing assistance to the Reporting Committee. Christine Winquist Nord provided technical guidance. Kevin O'Donnell and Alison Fields provided substantive and technical guidance and reviewed all edits and data-related issues. Denise Pinkowitz assisted in the preparation of the report.

The following additional staff members made valuable contributions in their reviews of the report: Deborah Klein, Bureau of Labor Statistics; Steven Carlson, Food and Nutrition Service; Michael Kogan, Maternal and Child Health Bureau; Shelley Burns, Val Plisko, and Jerry West, National Center for Education Statistics; Jennifer Madans, National Center for Health Statistics; Caroline Wolf Harlow, National Institute of Justice; Robin Levine, U.S. Census Bureau; and Richard Bavier, Office of Management and Budget.

Carole Benson of Westat edited the report. Design contributions came from Westat's Graphic Arts Department, which designed the cover and flag pages, produced and updated the report's tables and figures, and updated and laid out the text. The logo was developed by John Jeter of the National Center for Health Statistics. Barbara Blount, U.S. Census Bureau, coordinated the printing of the report. The National Maternal and Child Health Clearinghouse distributed the report for the Forum.

## Highlights

**A**merica's Children: Key National Indicators of Well-Being, 2003 is the seventh annual report to the Nation on the condition of children in America. Nine contextual measures describe the changing population, family, and environmental context in which children are living, and 25 indicators depict the well-being of children in the areas of economic security, health, behavior and social environment, and education. This year's report has a special section featuring decennial census data that portrays changes in the lives of America's children from 1990 to 2000 for all States and the District of Columbia for nine indicators.

It is noteworthy that this year *America's Children* introduces an overweight indicator as a new measure of children's health. Children in America are more likely to be overweight than in previous years, and there are significant differences between boys and girls, as well as among racial and ethnic groups. The prevalence of overweight children has emerged as a serious public health concern; tracking this indicator in *America's Children* provides data on an essential dimension of child well-being. This year's report reveals significant progress in several other dimensions of child well-being. Adolescents are more likely to take honors courses, children overall are less likely to die in infancy or in adolescence, and young women have continued the downward trend of giving birth in adolescence. After a steady, decades-long decline, the share of children with married parents has remained unchanged since 1996. In light of the large body of research linking family structure to many of the other indicators in this report, this is an important finding. Less progress, however, has been realized in the economic security of children. After many years of decline, the poverty rate remained stable. In addition, the percentage of children with a parent employed full time declined slightly, and the percentage of households with children that had any housing problems has maintained the same rate since 1995. Yet, the percentage of children covered by health insurance maintained the all-time high. These are some of the highlights gleaned from *America's Children: Key National Indicators of Well-Being, 2003*.

### Part I: Population and Family Characteristics

- In 2001, there were 72.6 million children under age 18 in the United States, or 25 percent of the population, down from a peak of 36 percent at the end of the baby boom (1964). Children are projected to remain a substantial percentage of the total population, and are projected to comprise 24 percent of the population in 2020.
- The racial and ethnic diversity of America's children continues to increase. In 2000, 64 percent of U.S. children were White, non-Hispanic; 15 percent were

Black, non-Hispanic; 4 percent were Asian/Pacific Islander; and 1 percent were American Indian/Alaska Native. The proportion of Hispanic children has increased faster than that of any other racial and ethnic group, growing from 9 percent of the child population in 1980 to 16 percent in 2000.

- Between 1980 and 1994, the rate of childbearing by unmarried women rose sharply for women of all ages. For all age groups combined, this trend ended in 1994. Birth rates for unmarried teenagers have dropped considerably since 1994, while increases in rates for women in their 20s and older have slowed. In 2001, the overall birth rate was 44 births per 1,000 unmarried women ages 15-44.
- In 2002, 69 percent of children under age 18 lived with two married parents, down from 77 percent in 1980. However, the percentage has remained stable since 1995, ending a decades-long downward trend.
- Children's exposure to secondhand smoke, as indicated by blood cotinine levels, dropped between 1988-1994 and 1999-2000. Overall, 64 percent of children ages 4 to 11 had cotinine in their blood in 1999-2000, down from 88 percent in 1988-1994. In 1999-2000, 18 percent had blood cotinine levels more than 1.0 nanograms per milliliter, down from 26 percent in 1988-1994.

### Part II: Indicators of Children's Well-Being

#### Economic Security Indicators

- The poverty rate for children living with family members has decreased substantially since 1993, when it reached a high of 22 percent. The rate decreased to 16 percent in 2000 and has remained stable since.
- Despite the stall in the overall decline in child poverty, the rate continued to decline for Black children in female-householder families (47 percent in 2001 compared with 49 percent in 2000).
- In 2001, 36 percent of U.S. households with children had one or more of the following three housing problems: physically inadequate housing, crowded housing, or housing that cost more than 30 percent of the household income. Fueled by rising housing costs, this rate rose from 30 percent in 1978 to 36 percent in 1995, and has remained stable since.
- In 2001, the percentage of children covered by health insurance maintained the all-time high of 88 percent that was attained in 2000. While government health insurance coverage has continued its upward trend since 1999, the proportion of children covered by private health insurance dropped slightly in 2001, reversing the upward trend since 1994.

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## Health Indicators

- The proportion of children ages 6 to 18 who were overweight increased from 6 percent in 1976-1980 to 15 percent in 1999-2000. Racial, ethnic, and gender disparities exist, such that in 1999-2000, Black, non-Hispanic girls and Mexican American boys were at particularly high risk of being overweight (24 percent and 29 percent, respectively).
- The infant mortality rate has decreased steadily from a high of 10.9 deaths per 1,000 births in 1983 to a low of 6.9 deaths per 1,000 births in 2000. Infant mortality has dropped for all racial and ethnic groups since 1983, but substantial racial and ethnic disparities persist, with the Black, non-Hispanic infant mortality rate consistently higher than that of other racial or ethnic groups.
- Adolescent mortality has steadily declined throughout the 1990s, from 89 deaths per 100,000 in 1991 to an all-time low of 67 deaths per 100,000 in 2000.
- Deaths from firearm injuries among adolescents declined between 1994 and 2000, particularly among Black and Hispanic males. For example, from 1994 to 2000, the firearm homicide rate declined from 126 to 52 deaths per 100,000 Black males and from 49 to 22 deaths per 100,000 Hispanic males.
- The birth rate for adolescents continued to decline in 2001 to 25 births per 1,000 females ages 15 to 17, representing the lowest rate ever recorded.
- The decrease in adolescent births is apparent for all racial and ethnic groups and is notable among Black adolescents. The birth rate among Black, non-Hispanic females ages 15 to 17 dropped by nearly half between 1991 and 2001 (from 86 to 45 births per 1,000, respectively), completely reversing the increase from 1986 to 1991.

## Behavior and Social Environment Indicators

- In 2002, daily cigarette use among 8th-, 10th-, and 12th-graders reached its lowest point since the beginning of the Monitoring the Future Survey (5 percent, 10 percent, and 17 percent, respectively), continuing the downward trend that began in 1997 for 12th-graders and in 1996 for 10th- and 8th-graders.
- From 2001 to 2002, the proportion of 10th-graders reporting episodic heavy drinking (i.e., having at least five drinks in a row at least once in the previous 2 weeks) declined from 25 percent to 22 percent. Rates remained stable from 2001 to 2002

among 8th- and 12th-graders, with 12 and 29 percent, respectively, reporting this type of alcohol consumption in 2002.

- Between 2001 and 2002, illicit drug use in the past 30 days declined from 23 percent to 21 percent among 10th-graders. One-quarter of 12th-graders and one-tenth of 8th-graders reported past-30-day illicit drug use in 2002, unchanged from the previous year.

## Education Indicators

- The percentage of high school graduates who had taken honors-level English courses increased from 29 percent in 1998 to 34 percent in 2000. The percentage of 2000 high school graduates taking advanced mathematics, science, English, and foreign language courses has increased significantly since 1982.
- In 2002, the percentage of 25- to 29-year-olds who attained a bachelor's degree or higher remained at an all-time high of 29 percent. The percentage of White, non-Hispanic 25- to 29-year-olds with a bachelor's degree increased from 33 percent in 2001 to 36 percent in 2002.

## Special Feature

- In 2000, 68 percent of children under 18 years old lived in married-couple families, down from 72 percent in 1990. The decline in children living in married-couple families occurred in all States in the Nation, with several States showing a decrease of about 7 percentage points. New Jersey had a small decrease (1.7 percentage points), from 74 percent in 1990 to 72 percent in 2000.
- In 2000, 19 percent of children lived in crowded housing, up from 16 percent a decade earlier. In Nevada, a rapidly-growing State, the proportion of children living in crowded housing increased from 20 percent in 1990 to 27 percent in 2000, the largest increase in the Nation. However, the largest decrease was found in Texas, where the rate decreased from 25 percent in 1990 to 15 percent in 2000.
- Nationally, the proportion of children ages 3 to 5 enrolled in preprimary education rose from 42 percent in 1990 to 61 percent in 2000, representing an increase of 19 percentage points. Geographic variation in preprimary education among children ages 3 to 5 is apparent, with most of the smaller increases clustered among the Western states. Georgia, a Southern state, had the largest increase, from 41 percent in 1990 to 67 percent in 2000.

# Summary List of Selected Measures and Indicators of Child Well-Being

Indicator Name	Description of Measure or Indicator	Previous Year of Data Value (Year)	New Data Value (Year)	Change <sup>a</sup> Between Years
<b>Population and Family Characteristics (selected measures)</b>				
Difficulty speaking English	Percentage of children ages 5 to 17 who speak a language other than English at home and have difficulty speaking English	5.1 (1995)	5.0 (1999)	NS
Family structure and children's living arrangements	Percentage of children under age 18 living with two married parents	69 (2001)	69 (2002)	NS
Births to unmarried women	Percentage of all births that are to unmarried women	33 (2000)	34 (2001)	▲
<b>Economic Security</b>				
Child poverty and family income	Percentage of related children under age 18 in poverty	16 (2000)	16 (2001)	NS
Secure parental employment	Percentage of children under age 18 living with parents with at least one parent employed full time all year	80 (2000)	79 (2001)	NS
Housing problems	Percentage of households with children under age 18 that report housing problems	35 (1999)	36 (2001)	NS
Food security and diet quality	Percentage of children under age 18 in households reporting child hunger due to food insecurity	0.7 (1999)	0.6 (2001)	NS
	Percentage of children ages 2 to 6 with a good diet	20 (1994-1996)	20 (1999-2000)	NS
Access to health care	Percentage of children under age 18 covered by health insurance	88 (2000)	88 (2001)	NS
	Percentage of children under age 18 with no usual source of health care	7 (2000)	6 (2001)	▼
<b>Health</b>				
General health status	Percentage of children under age 18 in very good or excellent health	82 (2000)	83 (2001)	NS
Activity limitation	Percentage of children ages 5 to 17 with any limitation in activity resulting from chronic conditions	7 (2000)	8 (2001)	▲
Overweight	Percentage of children ages 6 to 18 who are overweight	11 (1988-1994)	15 (1999-2000)	▲
Childhood immunization	Percentage of children ages 19 to 35 months who received combined series immunization coverage	76 (2000)	77 (2001)	NS

Legend: NS = No significant change ▲ = Significant increase ▼ = Significant decrease — = not applicable

<sup>a</sup> Change noted is statistically significant.



## Summary List of Selected Measures and Indicators of Child Well-Being

Indicator Name	Description of Measure or Indicator	Previous Year of Data Value (Year)	New Data Value (Year)	Change <sup>a</sup> Between Years
<b>Health (cont.)</b>				
Low birthweight	Percentage of infants weighing less than 5.5 pounds at birth	7.6 (2000)	7.7 (2001)	▲
Infant mortality	Deaths before the first birthday per 1,000 live births	7.0 (1999)	6.9 (2000)	▼
Child mortality	Deaths per 100,000 children ages 1 to 4	35 (1999)	32 (2000)	▼
	Deaths per 100,000 children ages 5 to 14	19 (1999)	18 (2000)	▼
Adolescent mortality	Deaths per 100,000 adolescents ages 15 to 19	69 (1999)	67 (2000)	NS
Adolescent births	Births per 1,000 females ages 15 to 17	27 (2000)	25 (2001)	▼
<b>Behavior and Social Environment</b>				
Regular cigarette smoking	Percentage of 8th-grade students who reported smoking daily in the previous 30 days	5.5 (2001)	5.1 (2002)	NS
	Percentage of 10th-grade students who reported smoking daily in the previous 30 days	12 (2001)	10 (2002)	▼
	Percentage of 12th-grade students who reported smoking daily in the previous 30 days	19 (2001)	17 (2002)	▼
Alcohol use	Percentage of 8th-grade students who reported having five or more alcoholic beverages in a row in the last 2 weeks	13 (2001)	12 (2002)	NS
	Percentage of 10th-grade students who reported having five or more alcoholic beverages in a row in the last 2 weeks	25 (2001)	22 (2002)	▼
	Percentage of 12th-grade students who reported having five or more alcoholic beverages in a row in the last 2 weeks	30 (2001)	29 (2002)	NS
Illicit drug use	Percentage of 8th-grade students who have used illicit drugs in the previous 30 days	12 (2001)	10 (2002)	NS
	Percentage of 10th-grade students who have used illicit drugs in the previous 30 days	23 (2001)	21 (2002)	▼
	Percentage of 12th-grade students who have used illicit drugs in the previous 30 days	26 (2001)	25 (2002)	NS
Youth victims and perpetrators of serious violent crimes	Rate of serious violent crime victimizations per 1,000 youth ages 12 to 17	20 (1999)	16 (2000)	NS
	Serious violent crime offending rate per 1,000 youth ages 12 to 17	26 (1999)	17 (2000)	NS

Legend: NS = No significant change ▲ = Significant increase ▼ = Significant decrease — = not applicable

<sup>a</sup> Change noted is statistically significant.

## Summary List of Selected Measures and Indicators of Child Well-Being

Indicator Name	Description of Measure or Indicator	Previous Year of Data Value (Year)	New Data Value (Year)	Change <sup>a</sup> Between Years
<b>Education</b>				
Family reading to young children	Percentage of children ages 3 to 5 who are read to every day by a family member	54 (1999)	58 (2001)	▲
Early childhood care and education	Percentage of children ages 3 to 5 who are enrolled in early childhood centers	60 (1999)	56 (2001)	▼
Mathematics and reading achievement (0-500 scale)	Average mathematics scale score of			
	9-year-olds	231 (1996)	232 (1999)	NS
	13-year-olds	274 (1996)	276 (1999)	NS
	17-year-olds	307 (1996)	308 (1999)	NS
	Average reading scale score of			
	9-year-olds	213 (1996)	212 (1999)	NS
	13-year-olds	258 (1996)	259 (1999)	NS
	17-year-olds	288 (1996)	288 (1999)	NS
High school academic coursetaking	Percentage of high school graduates who completed high-level coursework in			
	mathematics	41 (1998)	45 (2000)	NS
	science	62 (1998)	63 (2000)	NS
	English	29 (1998)	34 (2000)	▲
	foreign language	30 (1998)	30 (2000)	NS
High school completion	Percentage of young adults ages 18 to 24 who have completed high school	87 (2000)	87 (2001)	NS
Youth neither enrolled in school nor working	Percentage of youth ages 16 to 19 who are neither in school nor working	9 (2001)	9 (2002)	NS
Higher education	Percentage of high school graduates ages 25 to 29 who have completed a bachelor's degree or higher	29 (2001)	29 (2002)	NS

Legend: NS = No significant change ▲ = Significant increase ▼ = Significant decrease — = not applicable

<sup>a</sup> Change noted is statistically significant.

## About This Report



*America's Children: Key National Indicators of Well-Being, 2003*, developed by the Federal Interagency Forum on Child and Family Statistics, is the seventh annual synthesis of information on the status of the Nation's most valuable resource, our children. This report presents 25 key indicators of the well-being of children. These indicators are monitored through official Federal statistics covering children's economic security, health, behavior and social environment, and education. The report also presents data on nine key contextual measures and includes a special section featuring 1990 and 2000 decennial census data for all fifty states and the District of Columbia. The 20 agencies of the Forum have also introduced improvements in the measurement of several of the indicators presented last year.

### Purpose of *America's Children: Key National Indicators of Well-Being*

This report provides the Nation with a broad annual summary of national indicators of child well-being and monitors changes in these indicators over time. The Forum hopes that this report will stimulate discussions by policy-makers and the public, exchanges between the data and policy communities, and improvements in Federal data on children and families. In so doing, the Forum hopes that this report will lead to improvements in the well-being of America's children.

### The Federal Interagency Forum on Child and Family Statistics

The Forum is a formal structure for collaboration among 20 Federal agencies that produce or use statistical data on children and families. The members of the Forum are listed on the back of the cover page. Building on earlier cooperative activities, the Forum was founded in 1994. It was formally established by Executive Order No. 13045 in 1997 to foster the coordination and integration of the collection and reporting of data on children and families. The two major publications produced by the Forum are *America's Children: Key National Indicators of Well-Being* (produced annually since 1997) and *Nurturing Fatherhood: Improving Data and Research on Male Fertility, Family Formation and Fatherhood* (June 1998). The Forum also sponsored the *Counting Couples Workshop* in 2001 to evaluate the data available and the measurement of marriage, divorce, remarriage, and cohabitation. The Forum's primary missions are to develop ways to improve consistency and enhance the collection of data on children, youth, and families and to improve the reporting and dissemination of information on the status of children and families to the policy community and the general public.

### Structure of the report

*America's Children: Key National Indicators of Well-Being, 2003* is intended to present information and data on the well-being of children in a nontechnical, user-friendly format. It is designed to complement other more technical or comprehensive reports produced by the Forum agencies. The report is divided into two parts. The first part of the report, *Population and Family Characteristics*, presents data that illustrate the changes that have taken place during the past few decades in nine measures depicting the context of children's lives. These background measures provide a foundation for understanding the key indicators and the child population. They provide basic information about children in the United States and the social and demographic changes occurring in the child population. These data answer questions such as: How many children are there in the United States? What proportion of the population is under age 18? How racially and ethnically diverse are our children? How many have difficulty speaking English? In what types of families do they live? What is the quality of their environment? The second part, *Indicators of Children's Well-Being*, contains data on key indicators of how well we are doing in providing economic security, educational opportunity, and a healthy and safe environment in which children can play, learn, and grow. Unlike the data presented in Part I of the report, which simply describe the changing context in which children live, the data in Part II offer insight into how well children are faring by providing information in four key areas of child well-being: economic security, health, behavior and social environment, and education. For each background measure in *Part I: Population and Family Characteristics*, and each indicator in *Part II: Indicators of Children's Well-Being*, three components are presented:

- *Statements* about why the measure or indicator is important to understanding the condition of children;
- *Figures* showing important facts about trends or population groups; and
- *Highlights* with information on the current status, recent trends, and important differences by population groups noted.

In addition, Appendix A: Detailed Tables contains tabulated data for each measure and additional detail not discussed in the main body of the report. Appendix B: Data Source Descriptions contains descriptions of the sources and surveys used to generate the background measures and the indicators.

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## Aspects of child well-being depicted in this report

*America's Children: Key National Indicators of Well-Being, 2003* covers four domains of child well-being: economic security, health, behavior and social environment, and education. The economic security indicators document poverty and income among children and the accessibility of basic necessities such as food, housing, and health care. The health indicators document the physical health and well-being of children by presenting information on their health status, immunization coverage, death rates, and teenage births. The behavioral and social environment indicators present information about young people's participation in illegal or high-risk behaviors, such as smoking, drinking alcohol, using illicit drugs, and engaging in serious violent crimes. Finally, the education indicators examine how well we are succeeding in educating our children, including preschoolers' exposure to reading and early education, measures of student achievement, rigorous coursetaking in high school, and indicators of how many young adults complete high school and college.

## Special feature

At the end of *Part II, America's Children: Key National Indicators of Well-Being, 2003* presents a special section featuring 1990 and 2000 decennial census data. Special features present measures that are either not available with sufficient frequency to be considered as regular key indicators, or are new regular measures that the Forum believes merit special attention when first introduced into the *America's Children* report. In both cases, special features provide important information on child well-being. This year's special feature highlights change in the lives of America's children using 1990 and 2000 decennial census data for all 50 States and the District of Columbia. The Forum welcomes the opportunity to recognize the importance of state-level data.

## Changes since last year

*America's Children: Key National Indicators of Well-Being, 2003* is similar to last year's report in both format and content. While most of the indicators presented last year have been included and updated, the Forum has worked to improve the report in a number of important ways. Some changes reflect improvements in the availability of data for certain key indicators. Some changes clarify the concept being measured or expand the indicator substantively. This year, the section on Health indicators has been expanded to include children who are overweight as a regular key indicator. In addition, two new measures are included

in the *Population and Family Characteristics* section—children living with at least one foreign-born parent and children's exposure to secondhand smoke. Changes were made to the *Summary List of Indicators* by including three *Population and Family Characteristics* measures. Finally, improvements were made to the activity limitation indicator. The changes reflect the many helpful comments and suggestions for improvements that were received from readers and users of the previous reports.

## Children included in this report

In order to convey a comprehensive understanding of child well-being, the report looks at the status of all children under age 18 living in the United States. A few indicators provide data on older youth and young adults (persons ages 18 to 29). In most cases throughout the report, the word "children" refers to any person under age 18 living in a civilian or noninstitutionalized setting in the United States. In some other cases, such as vital statistics, all children are included. When data are being presented only for specific age groups, this is indicated in the text (e.g., children ages 1 to 4). As is also noted in the text, some indicators examine only particular groups of children (e.g., children living in family settings, children living with parents, children in certain age groups or grade levels). For most of the indicators, the relevant information has been reported by an adult in the household or family and not directly by the children.

In many cases, we have also presented the data on children by race and Hispanic origin. In most cases, Hispanics have been separated from the White and Black categories and "non-Hispanic" follows the race designation, such as "White, non-Hispanic." In some cases, data for Hispanics were not available or could not be separated from data for race groups. In these cases, data for race groups (White, Black, American Indian/Alaska Native, and Asian/Pacific Islander) include Hispanics.

## Selection of the key indicators

*America's Children: Key National Indicators of Well-Being, 2003* presents a selected set of key indicators of enduring interest that measure critical aspects of children's lives and are collected rigorously and regularly by Federal agencies. The Forum chose these indicators through careful examination of available data. In determining this list of key indicators, the Forum sought input from the Federal policy-making community, foundations, academic researchers, and State and local children's service providers. These indicators were chosen because they are:

- *Easy to understand* by broad audiences;
- *Objectively based* on substantial research connecting them to child well-being and using reliable data;
- *Balanced* so that no single area of children’s lives dominates the report;
- *Measured regularly* so that they can be updated and show trends over time; and
- *Representative* of large segments of the population, rather than one particular group.

## Data sources

Data for the key indicators are drawn primarily from national surveys and vital records. Federal agencies regularly survey the population on many issues. Some national surveys use interviewers to gather information on children through a variety of methods, including speaking directly, by telephone or in person, with families selected through rigorous sampling methods. Other surveys use questionnaires distributed directly to youth to ask about their behavior. In addition, some national data collection efforts directly assess students by giving them tests or by asking them to perform certain tasks. Federal agencies collect information on births and deaths from State health departments. These nationally representative surveys, along with data collected through vital statistics, provide the best available measures of the condition of U.S. children. Administrative data from social service agencies were not used for measures in this report. The availability and quality of such data can be affected by policy differences among agencies in various local areas and by resource constraints. Further information on data sources for this report is provided in *Appendix B: Data Source Descriptions*.

In the text of this report, percentages and rates are rounded to the nearest whole number, unless rounding would mask significant differences. The text discusses changes over time or between-group differences only when differences are statistically significant.

## Additional data needed

*America’s Children: Key National Indicators of Well-Being, 2003* identifies critical gaps in the data available on children and youth. It challenges the Nation as a whole—and the Federal statistical agencies in particular—to improve the monitoring of important areas of children’s lives. It also challenges Federal agencies to improve the timeliness with which information on children is made available to policy-makers and the public.

At the end of *Part I: Population and Family Characteristics* and at the end of each section in *Part II: Indicators of Children’s Well-Being*, the report presents a description

of data and measures of child well-being in need of development. These lists include many important aspects of children’s lives for which regular indicators are lacking or are in development, such as homelessness, long-term poverty, mental health, disability, neighborhood environment, and early childhood development. In some of these areas, the Forum is exploring ways to collect new measures and improve existing ones. In others, Forum agencies have successfully fielded surveys incorporating some new measures but they are not yet available on a regular basis for monitoring purposes.

## For further information

There are several good places to obtain additional information on each of the indicators found in this report. First, for many of the indicators, *Appendix A: Detailed Tables* contains additional detail not discussed in the main body of the report. For example, some tables show additional breakouts by gender, race and Hispanic origin, or another category. Second, *Appendix B: Data Source Descriptions* contains information and descriptions of the sources and surveys used to generate the indicators as well as information on how to contact the agency responsible for collecting the data or administering the relevant survey. Third, numerous publications of the Federal statistical agencies provide additional detail on each of the key indicators included in this report, as well as on scores of other indicators. These reports include *Trends in the Well-Being of America’s Children and Youth*, published annually by the Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation in the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services; *The Condition of Education*, published annually by the National Center for Education Statistics; and *Health, United States*, published annually by the National Center for Health Statistics. Often these compendia contain additional details not reported in *America’s Children*. *Appendix B: Data Source Descriptions* also contains a list of agency contacts who can provide further information on the relevant surveys and indicators. Finally, the Forum’s website, <http://childstats.gov>, contains many links to Forum agency publications that often provide more detail about the indicators in this report.

## America’s Children on the Internet

The report can be found on the World Wide Web at <http://childstats.gov>. The website version of the report contains all data for years that are presented in the figures but not in the tables in this report. The Forum’s website also contains information on the overall structure and organization of the Forum, as well as other reports, and news on current activities.

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Also found on the website are links to international comparative data and related reports of Forum agencies and other organizations providing more detailed data. The website addresses of the Forum agencies are found below.

## Agency Websites

**Federal Interagency Forum on Child and Family Statistics:**  
<http://childstats.gov>

**Department of Agriculture  
Food and Nutrition Service:**  
<http://www.fns.usda.gov>

**Department of Commerce  
U.S. Census Bureau:**  
<http://www.census.gov>

**Department of Defense  
Office of the Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense  
(Personnel Support, Families and Education):**  
<http://mfrc.calib.com>

**Department of Education  
National Center for Education Statistics:**  
<http://nces.ed.gov>

**Department of Health and Human Services  
Administration for Children and Families:**  
<http://www.acf.dhhs.gov>  
**Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality:**  
<http://www.ahrq.gov>  
**Maternal and Child Health Bureau:**  
<http://www.mchb.hrsa.gov>  
**National Center for Health Statistics:**  
<http://www.cdc.gov/nchs>  
**National Institute of Child Health and Human  
Development:**  
<http://www.nichd.nih.gov>  
**National Institute on Drug Abuse:**  
<http://www.nida.nih.gov>  
**Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and  
Evaluation:**  
<http://aspe.os.dhhs.gov>

**Department of Housing and Urban Development  
Office of Policy Development and Research:**  
<http://www.huduser.org>

**Department of Justice  
Bureau of Justice Statistics:**  
<http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/bjs>  
**National Institute of Justice:**  
<http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/nij>  
**Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency  
Prevention:**  
<http://www.ojjdp.ncjrs.org>

**Department of Labor  
Bureau of Labor Statistics:**  
<http://www.bls.gov>  
**Women's Bureau:**  
<http://www.dol.gov/wb>

**Department of Transportation  
National Highway Traffic Safety Administration:**  
<http://www.nhtsa.dot.gov>

**Environmental Protection Agency  
Office of Children's Health Protection:**  
<http://yosemite.epa.gov/ochp/ochpweb.nsf/homepage>

**National Science Foundation  
Division of Science Resources Statistics:**  
<http://www.nsf.gov/sbe/srs>

**Office of Management and Budget  
Statistical and Science Policy Office:**  
<http://www.whitehouse.gov/omb/inforeg/statpolicy.htm>

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