

## Utah No. 4 in national child well-being report

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SALT LAKE CITY — Being a child in Utah is better than being a child in almost every other state in the country, a new report shows.

According to the Annie E. Casey Foundation's annual Kids Count Data Book, a national and state-by-state report that includes key measures and statistical trends on the condition of America's children and families, Utah ranked fourth overall this year — a drop from third in last year's data book.

However, the Beehive State saw improvements in several major indicators studied in the report.

The data showed that infant mortality declined slightly from 5.2 to 5.1 per 1,000 live births between 2000 and 2007. And the teen death rate fell from 60 to 50 deaths per 100,000 youths during the same period.

The teen birth rate decreased from 38 to 36 per 1,000 female teens during the period. But the data showed the state's rate is also 9 percent higher than it was in 2005.

Lastly, the percentage of children in single-parent families fell from 21 percent to 18 percent between the 2000 and 2008 timeframe.

"By nearly any measure, Utah remains a great place for children," Karen Crompton, executive director of Voices for Utah Children — a statewide child advocacy organization, said.

"This year's Data Book reveals that Utah improved on four of the 10 measures affecting child well-being since 2000."

Yet on three other measures, conditions worsened for Utah's kids, she noted.

Utah's number of babies born at low birth weight increased slightly between 2000 and 2007 from 6.6 percent to 6.7 percent. In addition, the number of teens not in school or who did not graduate from high school rose from 6 percent to 7 percent between the 2000 and 2008 time period.

The percentage of Utah children in poverty rose from 10 percent to 11 percent during the same eight-year span.

On a positive note, Crompton said the state tied for first in the number of children living in families where their parent or parents had full-time, year-round employment.

In 2008, just 19 percent of Utah children lacked secure parental employment, well below the national rate of 27 percent, she said.

The top three states in this year's overall ranking were New Hampshire, Minnesota and Vermont, while the states with the lowest rankings were Arkansas, Louisiana and Mississippi. The rankings included the District of Columbia, U.S. Virgin Islands and Puerto Rico.

Despite the slight drop in rank, "the numbers paint a pretty good picture for Utah," Crompton said. "And we should all be happy about that."

She said the challenge going forward will be for advocates and policymakers to devise strategies that will help every child in the state to have a fair chance to grow up in a safe, nurturing environment.

Until then, she said, the state will still have much work to do.

"Our ability to progress as a state depends on the degree to which we can create opportunities for all children to succeed," Crompton said.

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