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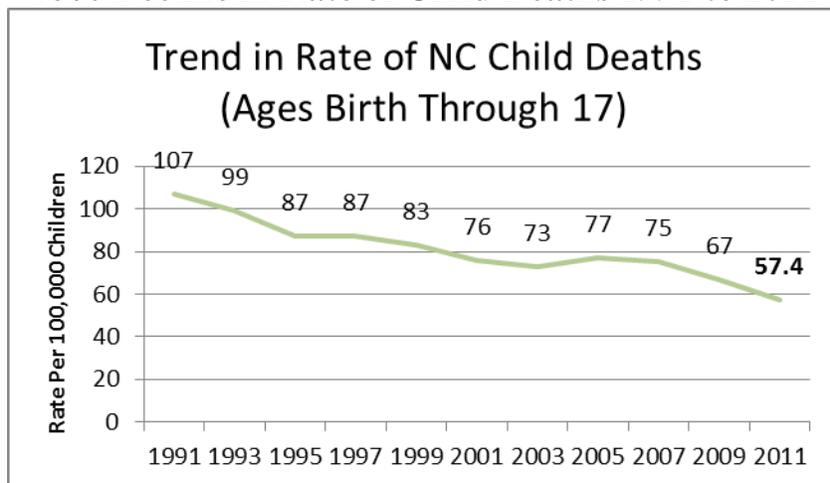
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North Carolina Child Death Rate Remains at Lowest Level in History

RALEIGH – Data released today by NC Child Fatality Task Force show that child death rates in North Carolina ticked downward slightly in 2011 to the lowest rate yet recorded. The child death rate has been cut almost in half over the past two decades.

“Growing the prosperity of our state depends on assuring that our next generation grows up healthy, safe and strong. Maintaining the lowest child death rate on record shows the value of focused public policies and sustained and strategic investments for improving outcomes for our children. Knitting together a variety of evidence-informed policies has effects across the spectrum to prevent child death and promote well-being,” noted Elizabeth Hudgins, Child Fatality Task Force Executive Director.

46% Decline in Rate of Child Deaths 1991 to 2011



Official figures gathered by the State Center for Health Statistics and the Child Fatality Prevention Team Research Staff show a rate of 57.4 deaths per 100,000 children from birth through 17 years of age, compared to 57.5 deaths per 100,000 children in 2010 and 67.0 deaths per 100,000 children in 2009. When North Carolina developed the Child Fatality Prevention System in 1990, the rate exceeded 100 deaths per 100,000 children. In total, about 10,400 child deaths have been prevented— about the equivalent of averting 8 years of child death – than if the 1991 child death rate had prevailed.

“Prevention is prevention is prevention,” commented Karen McLeod, Task Force Co-chair and Benchmarks President/CEO. “Each child death is just the tip of the iceberg, representing hundreds if not thousands of injuries or other undesirable results. The same strategies that reduce child death help prevent poor birth outcomes, broken bones, and violence against and by children.”

Highlights of the 2011 data include:

- The 2011 death rate of 57.4 deaths per 100,000 children is the lowest recorded rate. It represents a decline of 46% since 1991 (the inception of the Child Fatality Prevention System).
- Poisoning is the fastest growing cause of child death. The majority of these deaths are to older adolescents, aged 15-17. The increase is due mainly to misuse of prescription drugs and consistent with national trends. In the 1990s, it was unusual to record more than 3 teen poisoning deaths a year. Now, fewer than 10 in one year is unusual. Efforts such as Operation Medicine Drop, effective use of the Controlled Substance Reporting System, and other policy initiatives can help reduce misuse of prescription drugs.
- While the infant mortality rate remains near its historic low in 2010, infants under age 1 comprise about two-thirds of all child deaths. Birth defects were also the cause of 7% of deaths to children over age 1 in 2011.
- Illness is a major cause of death, accounting for 19% of child deaths in 2011. Illness is the leading cause of death for children aged 1 to 14.
- Motor vehicle crashes are the leading cause of injury death for children.
- The number of drowning deaths which had been unusually high in 2010 declined to more typical levels in 2011. This is on the heels of increased water safety efforts by Safe Kids NC and others.

“In the days following elections, it's helpful to reflect on what is at stake with public policy. Fortunately for NC children and families, public policies save lives when well implemented. It's a credit to the work of our Governors, General Assembly and partners across the decades,” concluded Dr. Peter Morris, co-chair of the Child Fatality Task Force and Wake County Human Services Medical Director. “It takes healthy, strong communities to grow healthy children. As members of the Task Force, we all know that a range of strategies and on-going commitment work together to assure the well-being of our next generation.”

Population data from 2010 and beyond rely on National Center for Health Statistics Bridged estimates. Due to these changes which affect the dominator, caution should be taken in comparing to rates prior to 2010. The number of child deaths for each county by cause and age are also available. Because the numbers for each county are relatively small, rates are not computed and all data should be used and interpreted with caution. State and county data can be found online at <http://www.epi.state.nc.us/SCHS/>.

In 1991, the NC General Assembly adopted a child fatality prevention system. This system includes the NC Child Fatality Task Force, the policy arm of the system; the State Child Fatality Prevention Team (under the direction of the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner), which reviews individual cases and identifies statewide trends; and local child fatality prevention teams in all 100 counties, which review local cases and recommend local changes needed to prevent future child deaths. For more information about the Child Fatality Task Force, please see <http://www.ncleg.net/DocumentSites/Committees/NCCFTF/Homepage/>.