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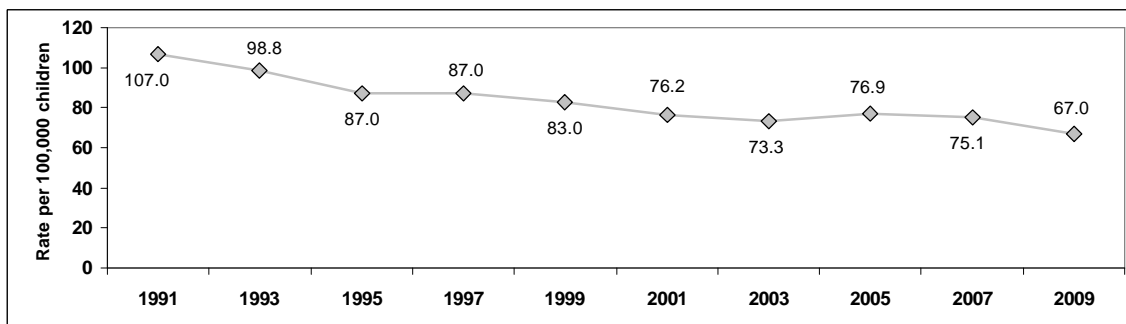
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North Carolina Child Death Rate Continues to Fall

RALEIGH – In 2009, North Carolina’s child death rate decreased to the lowest rate ever recorded, according to the NC Child Fatality Task Force, a legislative study commission which examines causes of child deaths and makes recommendations to prevent future deaths.

Official figures gathered by the State Center for Health Statistics and the Child Fatality Prevention Team Research Staff show a rate of 67 deaths per 100,000 children from birth through 17 years of age, compared to 71 deaths per 100,000 children in 2008.

“This is truly a success story for North Carolina,” noted Elizabeth Hudgins, Executive Director of the Child Fatality Task Force. “The child fatality rate has declined an impressive 37% since the inception of the Child Fatality Prevention System in 1991. These data show that focused public policies can create and maintain infrastructure, raise public awareness, and generally make lives better for North Carolina children and families.”



For 2009, 886 more children - about 40 classrooms worth - are alive than if the 1991 rate of child death had continued. Fewer children died from motor vehicle injuries, homicide and illness, which contributed substantially to the decrease. The largest decline between 2008 and 2009 in the number of deaths was of teenagers between the ages of 15 and 17 years, with a 10% reduction.

“While this is truly good news, we must not rest on our laurels,” said Tom Vitaglione, co-chair of the Task Force, and a Senior Fellow with Action for Children North Carolina. “In the beginning of 2009, the state had more infrastructure in place to protect children. Then, as the downturn hit and state revenues declined, programs that helped prevent child injury and death were cut and sometimes

eliminated altogether. The two-decade array of services that helped reduce infant mortality was reduced drastically. Last year, the budget halved call-line hours available to link suicidal teens with local resources. And even deeper cuts are expected in the next budget cycle. The Child Fatality Task Force will be looking carefully at protecting key child-saving programs.”

Highlights of the data include:

- The 2009 death rate of 67 deaths per 100,000 children is the lowest recorded rate. It represents a decline of almost 6% since 2008 and 37% since 1991.
- As reported earlier, the infant mortality rate dropped by 4% from 2008 to 2009 and by 27% since 1991. Infants under the age of 1 comprised 68% of the child deaths in 2009. (This is consistent with recent past years.)
- Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS) accounted for 98 deaths in 2009. This number is down sharply from 2008 when 136 babies died due to SIDS and is consistent with the average number of SIDS for previous years.
- Motor vehicle crashes remain the leading cause of injury death. The number of child fatalities related to these crashes has fallen in the presence of a number of public policies to keep children more safe on the roads, including infant and child safety seats, backseat buckling laws, and graduated driver license requirements.
- The number of homicides decreased, but the number of suicides increased. Of non-health related conditions, suicide is the third leading contributor to teen death in North Carolina.
- While the number of poisoning deaths declined between 2008 and 2009, the longer-term trend is an increase in poisoning deaths, with the five year averages close to doubling in the past decade.

“These data are critical to making informed decisions,” concluded Karen McLeod, co-chair of the Task Force, and President/CEO of Child and Family Services Association. “They provide information about where to target efforts. Then the Task Force and our committees couple that data with partner expertise to make recommendations on ways to save kids’ lives. While the current budget situation is dire, the Task Force will continue to prioritize children.”

The NC Child Fatality Task Force also released the number of child deaths for each county by cause and age. 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.schs.state.nc.us/SCHS/deaths/child/cd2009.html>.

For more detail on child death by race and age (from 1991 to 2008), please see <http://www.ncleg.net/DocumentSites/Committees/NCCFTF/Reports%20and%20Data/Child%20Fatality%20Data%20by%20Race%20and%20Age%201991%20to%202008%209-10.pdf>.

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/>.