



The Independent Voice for Kentucky's Children

KENTUCKY
YOUTH
ADVOCATES

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**BIRTH OUTCOMES STRONG AMONG MOTHERS BORN OUTSIDE THE U.S.;
LARGE GAPS FOUND IN ACCESS TO PRENATAL CARE IN KENTUCKY**

Louisville, KY – All babies need a healthy start in life. Yet Kentucky birth data show mothers born outside the U.S. do not receive adequate care during pregnancy to ensure healthy outcomes. Despite this, Kentucky babies of mothers born outside the U.S. as a group are more likely to be born at a healthy birthweight and after a full-term pregnancy. Kentucky Youth Advocates released these findings today in an issue brief, *Ensuring a Healthy Start: Prenatal Care and Birth Outcomes among Newborn Kentuckians*, using the most recent data available from Kentucky vital statistics.

The Commonwealth benefits from healthier births. Prenatal care is a cost effective way to ensure that Kentucky's future learners, workers, and leaders are healthy from the beginning. Increased access to prenatal care reduces medical costs in the long run and prevents developmental disabilities.

"Kentucky's trend on preterm and low-weight birth rates has been moving in the wrong direction," says Jenessa Bryan, policy analyst at Kentucky Youth Advocates. "The silver lining is the low rates among babies born to immigrant women."

Recent medical research correlates the positive birth outcomes among mothers born outside the U.S. with a "cultural protective effect," which includes informal care networks and social support systems. Part of this protective effect is that foreign-born women are less likely to smoke during pregnancy – the leading cause of low-weight births.

"We as a state can learn a lot from the community supports mothers migrating to the U.S. rely on for a healthy pregnancy," says Terry Brooks, executive director of Kentucky Youth Advocates. "However, these lessons alone cannot take the place of comprehensive prenatal care."

Kentucky data demonstrate gaps in access to prenatal health care. A mother's race and ethnicity, country of birth, and place of residence can impact the likelihood that she will receive early and routine prenatal care.

In Kentucky between 2000 and 2003:

- Five percent of all children had mothers who were born outside the U.S.
- Only 77% of births to mothers born outside the U.S. received early prenatal care, compared to 86% of births to U.S.-born mothers.
- Babies of Hispanic mothers born outside the U.S. were least likely to receive early prenatal care. Only 66% of babies born to Hispanic mothers born outside the U.S. received early prenatal care, compared to 81% of babies born to U.S.-born Hispanic mothers.
- Thirty percent of all births to mothers born outside the U.S. did not have access to the recommended 10 or more regular prenatal care visits.
- In the regions of Northern Kentucky and greater Louisville area, mothers were most likely to receive early prenatal care, while mothers in the Eastern, South Central and Bluegrass regions were significantly less likely to receive early prenatal care.

Cost-effective solutions to increase access to prenatal care include improving outreach in communities with low access, reducing racial and ethnic disparities in access, enrolling eligible women in Medicaid, providing medical services in a language women can understand, and working with health care providers to be cognizant of a woman's cultural background. Improving access to early and regular prenatal care for all babies ensures a healthy start for all Kentucky babies.

Access the issue brief at www.kyyouth.org.

Kentucky Youth Advocates is a non-partisan, non-profit, children's advocacy organization. KYA represents a voice for Kentucky's most precious asset – its youth. We believe that Kentucky's youth deserve the opportunities and resources necessary to ensure their productive development and health.