America's Children in Brief:
Key National Indicators of Well-Being, 2006

Forum on Child and Family Statistics

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Introduction

Welcome to this edition of *America's Children in Brief: Key National Indicators of Well-Being, 2006*. Each year since 1997, the Federal Interagency Forum on Child and Family Statistics (Forum) has published *America's Children: Key National Indicators of Well-Being*, a report that includes detailed information on the well-being of children and families. The Forum updates all data annually on its website (http://childstats.gov), and alternates publishing the more detailed report with a condensed version that highlights selected indicators. Thus, this July, the Forum is publishing the *Brief* and will return to publishing the more detailed report in July 2007.

The indicators and background measures presented in this *Brief* have all been reported previously by the Forum. One indicator—Parental Reports of Emotional and Behavioral Difficulties—was first presented as a Special Feature in the 2005 report and has now become an annual indicator. The background measures and 26 key indicators were chosen because they are easy to understand; are based on substantial research connecting them to child well-being; vary across important areas of children's lives; are measured regularly so that they can be updated and show trends over time; and represent large segments of the population, rather than one particular group.

The first section, *Population and Family Characteristics*, describes the context in which children live (including aspects such as changes in children's family settings and living arrangements). The sections that follow highlight indicators of child well-being in four key areas: *Economic Security*, *Health*, *Behavior and Social Environment*, and *Education*. The data in this year's report show that adolescent birth rates continued to decline to the lowest ever recorded, immunization rates were at record highs, more young children were being read to daily by a family member, average mathematics scores of 4th- and 8th-graders reached an all-time high, and teen smoking was at the lowest rate since data collection began. However, the proportion of births to unmarried women continued to rise, the rate of infants born with low or very low birthweight continued to increase, the trend of overweight children also rose, and the percentage of children living in families with incomes below their poverty thresholds remained at 17 percent. The *Brief* also provides a summary list highlighting changes between the two most recent data collections for each background measure and indicator. For information on longer-term trends, see specific data tables and figures for all background measures and indicators on the Forum's website, http://childstats.gov.

About the Forum

The Forum fosters coordination and integration among 20 Federal agencies that produce or use statistical data on children and families. The *America's Children* series provides an accessible compendium of indicators across a spectrum of topics drawn from the most reliable official statistics and is designed to complement other more specialized, technical, or comprehensive reports produced by various Forum agencies.

For Further Information

The Forum's website provides the following information:

- Detailed data tables and figures that display additional data, including trend data, not discussed in this *Brief*.

- Data source descriptions that provide information about the sources and surveys used to generate the background measures and indicators as well as information on how to contact the agency responsible for collecting the data or administering the relevant survey.

- Previous *America's Children* reports from 1997 through 2005, as well as other Forum reports.

- Links to Forum agencies, publications, and related reports that offer further information about child and family statistics as well as international comparative data.

- Forum news and information on the Forum's overall structure and organization.