Unrealized Health Potential:

A Snapshot of West Virginia

UNREALIZED HEALTH POTENTIAL AMONG CHILDREN

Based on two important indicators of health, infant mortality and children's general health status, children in West Virginia are not as healthy as they could be. The levels of health for most West Virginia children fall short of levels for children in the most-advantaged subgroups in the state and across the country. This snapshot describes these gaps as well as the social factors that are linked with these differences in health.

INFANT MORTALITY

West Virginia ranks 43rd among states based on the size of the gap in infant mortality by mother's education, when comparing the current overall state rate of 7.4 deaths per 1,000 live births with the lower rate—4.4 deaths per 1,000 live births—seen among infants born to the state's most-educated mothers. Even if West Virginia achieved this lower rate overall, infant mortality in the state would still exceed the *national benchmark* of 3.2 deaths per 1,000 live births—the lowest infant mortality rate seen in any state among babies born to mothers with 16 or more years of schooling. In West Virginia, infant mortality rates in every maternal education and racial or ethnic group did not meet the national benchmark.

CHILDREN'S GENERAL HEALTH STATUS

West Virginia ranks 39th among states based on the size of the gap in children's general health status by family income, when comparing the current overall rate of 15.8 percent of children in less than optimal health with the lower rate—7.0 percent—seen among children in higher-income families. Even if West Virginia achieved this lower rate overall, the state's rate would still exceed the *national benchmark* for children's general health status of 3.5 percent—the lowest rate of less than optimal health seen in any state among children in families that both were higher income and practiced healthy behaviors. In West Virginia, the general health status of children in every income, education and racial or ethnic group did not meet the national benchmark.

SOCIAL FACTORS AFFECTING CHILDREN'S HEALTH

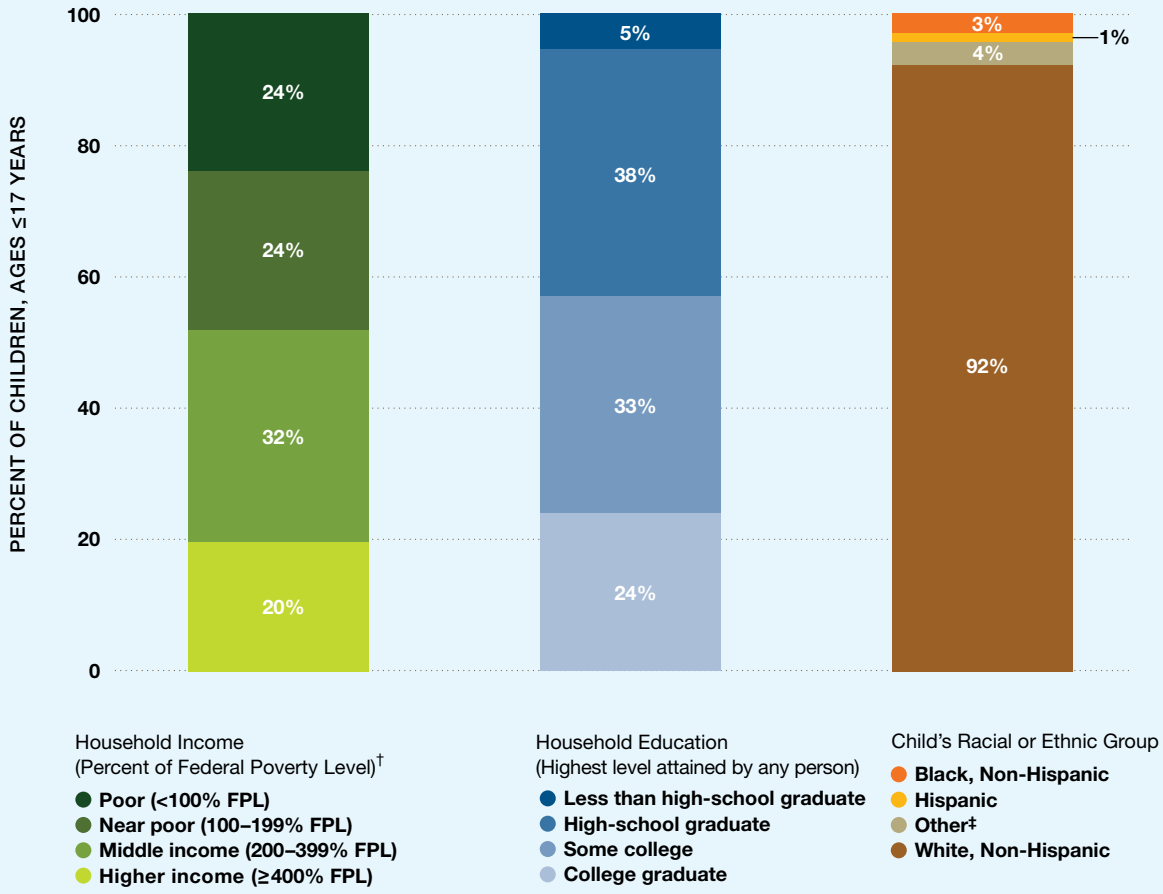
Social factors such as income, education and racial or ethnic group can greatly affect a child's health. This snapshot describes these factors and how they are linked with infant mortality and children's general health status in the state.

WEST VIRGINIA:

Social Factors Affecting Children's Health

Health during childhood is powerfully linked with social factors such as the income and education levels of a child's family and his or her racial or ethnic group. This snapshot of children ages 17 years or younger in West Virginia shows that:

- Nearly half of West Virginia's children live in poor or near-poor households, one third live in middle-income households and one fifth live in higher-income households.
- Approximately two fifths of children in West Virginia live in households where no one has education beyond high school, one third live with at least one person who has attended but not completed college and one fourth live with at least one college graduate.
- The overwhelming majority (92 percent) of West Virginia's children are non-Hispanic white, 3 percent are non-Hispanic black and 1 percent are Hispanic.



Prepared for the RWJF Commission to Build a Healthier America by the Center on Social Disparities in Health at the University of California, San Francisco.
Source: 2006 American Community Survey (for data on income and racial or ethnic group); 2005-2007 Current Population Survey (for education data).

† Guidelines set by the U.S. government for the amount of income providing a bare minimum of food, clothing, transportation, shelter and other necessities. In 2006, the U.S. FPL was $16,079 for a family of three and $20,614 for a family of four.

‡ "Other" includes children in any other racial or ethnic group or in more than one group.

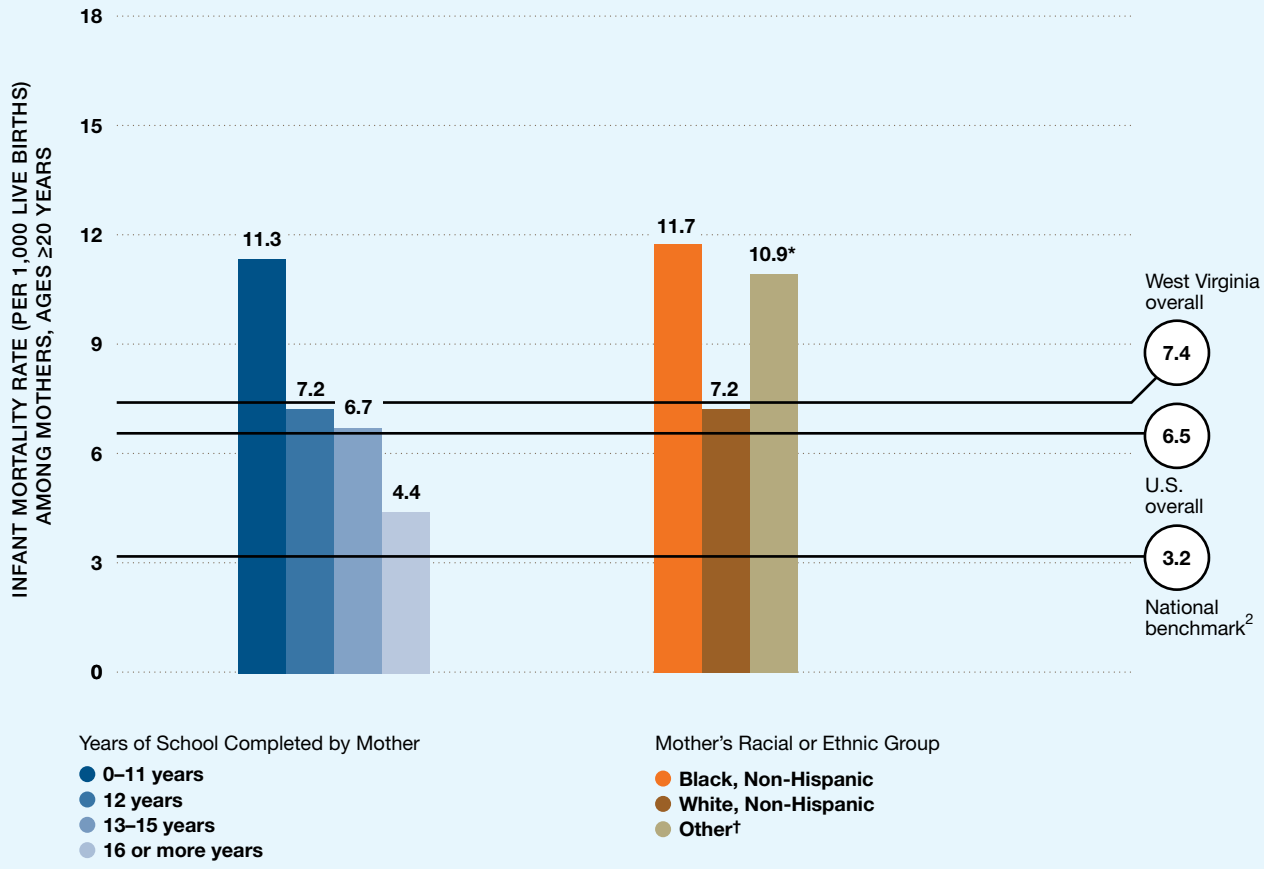
WEST VIRGINIA:

Gaps in Infant Mortality

Infant mortality rates[1]—a key indicator of overall health—appear to vary by mother's education and racial or ethnic group in West Virginia.

- Compared with babies born to the most-educated mothers, babies born to mothers with less education appear more likely to die before reaching their first birthdays. The infant mortality rate among babies born to mothers with less than 12 years of education is approximately 2.5 times the rate for babies born to mothers with 16 or more years of schooling.
- Although the infant mortality rate among babies born to non-Hispanic white mothers appears lower than the rates seen in other racial or ethnic groups, the differences are not statistically significant.

Comparing West Virginia's experience against the national benchmark[2] for infant mortality reveals unrealized health potential among West Virginia babies across maternal education and racial or ethnic groups. Infants in every group could do better.



Prepared for the RWJF Commission to Build a Healthier America by the Center on Social Disparities in Health at the University of California, San Francisco.

Source: 2000-2002 Period Linked Birth/Infant Death Data Set.

1 The number of deaths in the first year of life per 1,000 live births.

2 The national benchmark for infant mortality represents the level of mortality that should be attainable for all infants in every state. The benchmark used here—3.2 deaths per 1,000 live births, seen in New Jersey and Washington state—is the lowest statistically-reliable rate among babies born to the most-educated mothers in any state.

* Rate based on fewer than 20 infant deaths and considered statistically unreliable.

† Defined as any other or unknown racial or ethnic group, including any group representing fewer than 3 percent of all infants born in the state during 2000-2002.

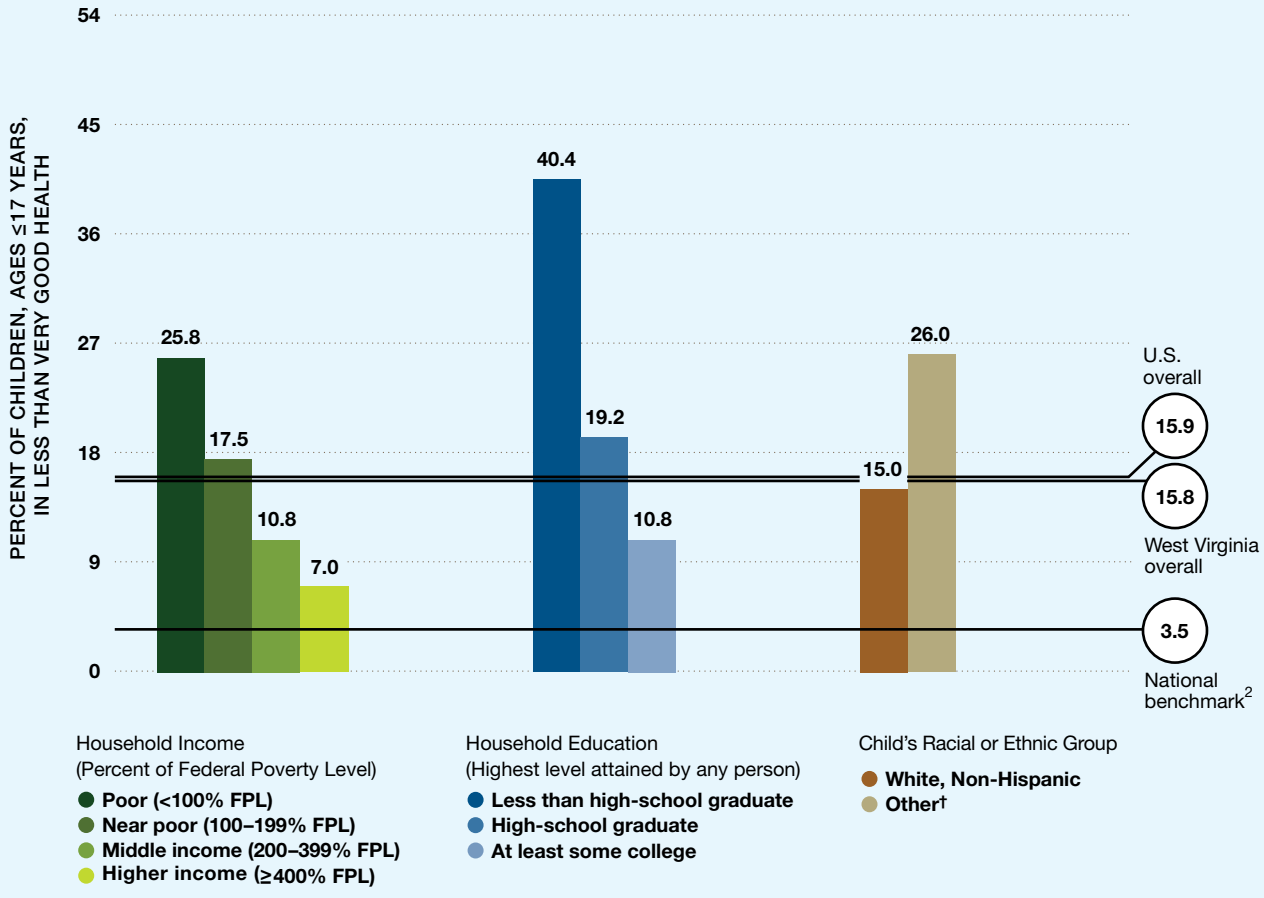
WEST VIRGINIA:

Gaps in Children's General Health Status

Within West Virginia, children's general health status[1] varies by family income and education and by racial or ethnic group. Children in the least-advantaged groups typically experience the worst health, but even children in middle-class families appear to be less healthy than those with greater advantages.

- Children in poor families are approximately 3.5 times as likely and children in near-poor families are 2.5 times as likely to be in less than optimal health as children in higher-income families.
- Children in households without a high-school graduate are approximately 3.5 times as likely to be in less than optimal health as children living with an adult who has completed at least some college.
- Children in the "other" racial or ethnic group (which includes non-Hispanic black and Hispanic children) are 1.7 times as likely as to be in less than optimal health as non-Hispanic white children.

Comparing West Virginia's experience against the national benchmark[2] reveals unrealized health potential among West Virginia children in every income, education and racial or ethnic group.



Prepared for the RWJF Commission to Build a Healthier America by the Center on Social Disparities in Health at the University of California, San Francisco.

Source: 2003 National Survey of Children's Health.

1 Based on parental assessment and measured as poor, fair, good, very good or excellent. Health reported as less than very good was considered to be less than optimal.

2 The national benchmark for children's general health status represents the level of health that should be attainable for all children in every state. The benchmark used here—3.5 percent of children with health that was less than very good, seen in Colorado—is the lowest statistically-reliable rate observed in any state among children whose families were not only higher income but also practiced healthy behaviors (i.e., non-smokers and at least one person who exercised regularly).

† Defined as any other or more than one racial or ethnic group, including any group with fewer than 3 percent of children in the state in 2003.