

Unrealized Health Potential: A Snapshot of New Jersey



UNREALIZED HEALTH POTENTIAL AMONG CHILDREN

Based on two important indicators of health, infant mortality and children's general health status, children in New Jersey are not as healthy as they could be. The levels of health for most New Jersey 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

New Jersey ranks 34th among states based on the size of the gap in infant mortality by mother's education, when comparing the current overall state rate of 5.8 deaths per 1,000 live births with the lower rate—3.2 deaths per 1,000 live births—seen among infants born to the state's most-educated mothers. If New Jersey achieved this lower rate overall, infant mortality in the state would meet 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. Despite the relatively low infant mortality rate seen for babies born to the most-educated mothers in New Jersey, rates in most other maternal education and racial or ethnic groups did not meet the national benchmark.

CHILDREN'S GENERAL HEALTH STATUS

New Jersey ranks 28th 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 15.6 percent of children in less than optimal health with the lower rate—8.0 percent—seen among children in higher-income families. Even if New Jersey 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 New Jersey, 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

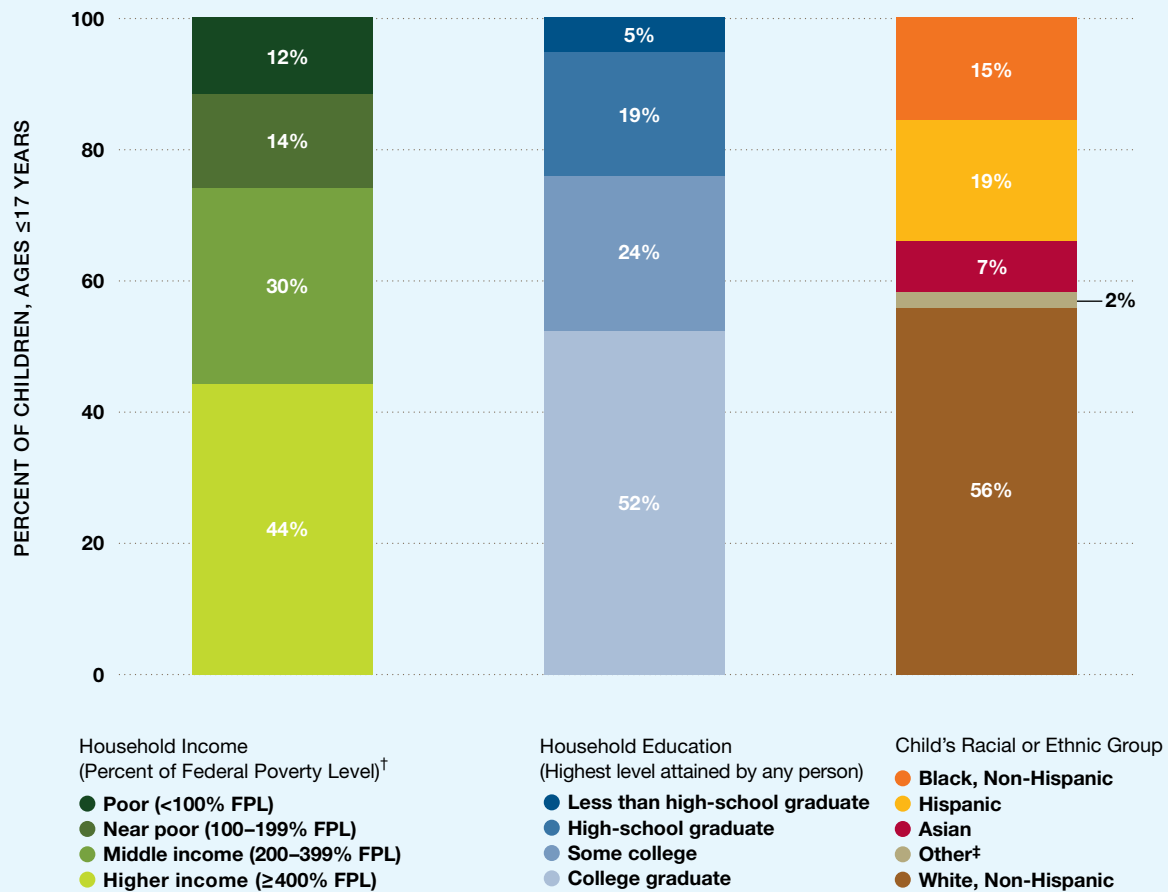
Social factors such as income, education and racial or ethnic group can greatly affect a child's health. This snapshot describes these factors and how they are linked with infant mortality and children's general health status in the state.



NEW JERSEY: 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 New Jersey shows that:

- One fourth of New Jersey's children live in poor or near-poor households, nearly one third live in middle-income households and approximately two fifths live in higher-income households.
- One fourth of children in New Jersey live in households where no one has education beyond high school, one fourth live with at least one person who has attended but not completed college and half live with at least one college graduate.
- More than half—56 percent—of New Jersey's children are non-Hispanic white, 19 percent are Hispanic, 15 percent are non-Hispanic black and 7 percent are Asian.



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.

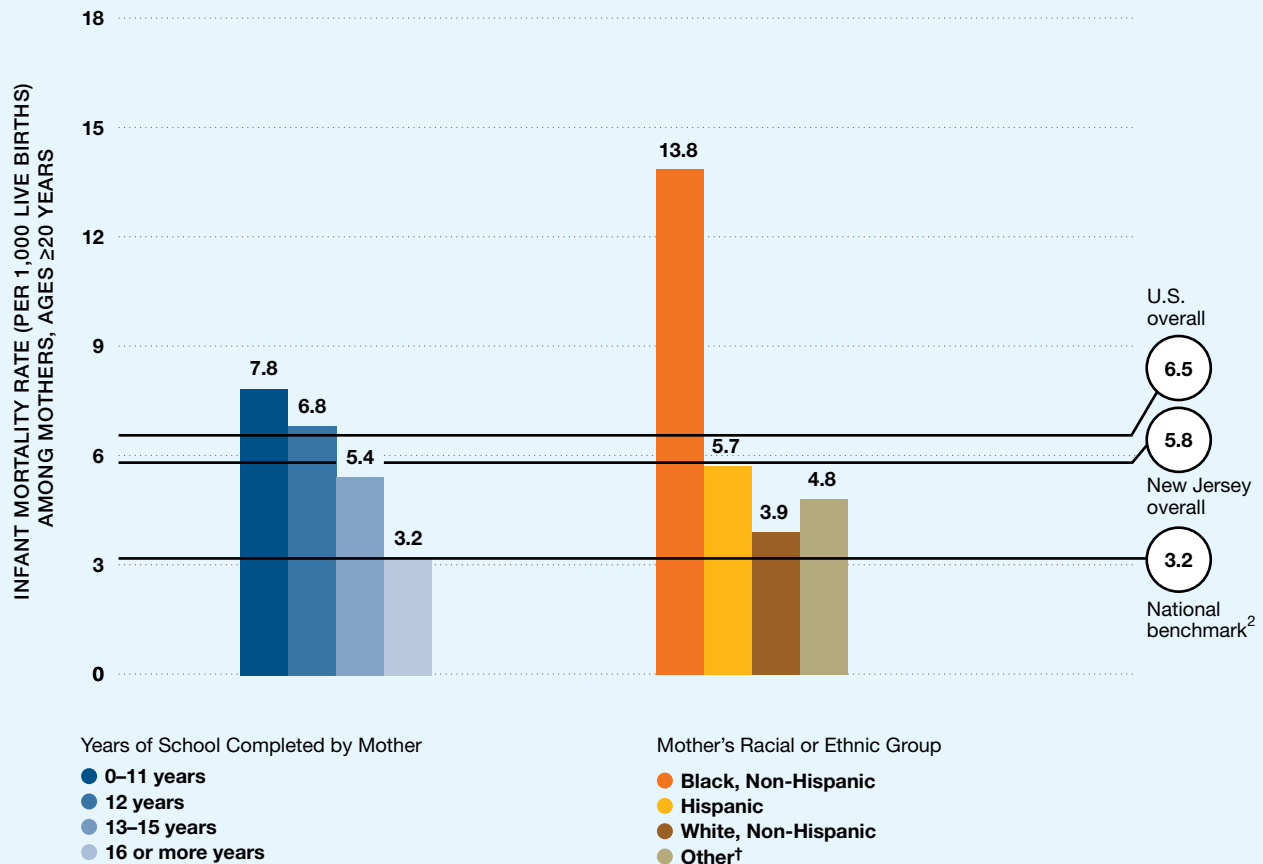
NEW JERSEY: Gaps in Infant Mortality

Infant mortality rates¹—a key indicator of overall health—vary by mother’s education and racial or ethnic group in New Jersey.

- Compared with babies born to the most-educated mothers, babies born to mothers with less education are more likely to die before reaching their first birthdays. While the infant mortality rates are highest among babies born to mothers with 12 or fewer years of schooling, the rate for babies born to mothers with 13-15 years of schooling is approximately 1.5 times that for babies born to more educated mothers.

- The infant mortality rate among babies born to non-Hispanic black mothers is 3.5 times the rate seen among babies of non-Hispanic white mothers and nearly 2.5 times that seen among babies born to Hispanic mothers.

While the experience of New Jersey babies born to the most-educated mothers meets the national benchmark² for infant mortality, comparison with this benchmark reveals unrealized health potential among New Jersey babies in almost all maternal education and racial or ethnic groups. Infants in most groups 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.

† 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.

NEW JERSEY: Gaps in Children's General Health Status

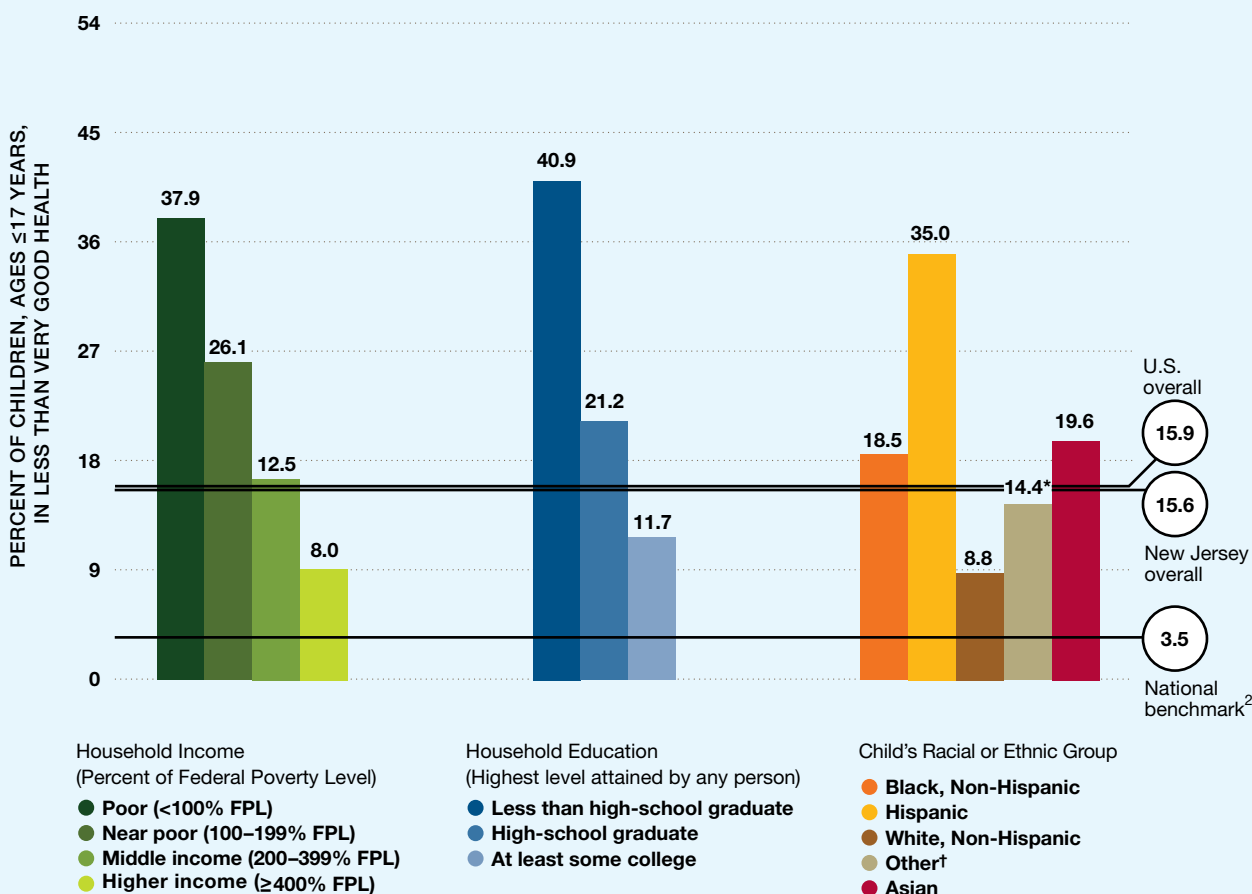
Within New Jersey, children's general health status¹ varies by family income and education and by racial or ethnic group. Children in the least-advantaged groups typically experience the worst health, but even children in middle-class families appear to be less healthy than those with greater advantages.

- Children in poor families are nearly five times as likely and children in near-poor families are approximately three 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 3.5 times as likely to be in less than

optimal health as children living with an adult who has completed some college.

- Hispanic children are four times as likely and non-Hispanic black children are approximately twice as likely to be in less than optimal health as non-Hispanic white children. Asian children also appear to have higher rates of less than optimal health than non-Hispanic white children, but this difference is not statistically significant.

Comparing New Jersey's experience against the national benchmark² reveals unrealized health potential among New Jersey 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).

* Rate has a relative standard error greater than 30 percent and is considered statistically unreliable.

† 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.