

Date: Mar 18, 2010; Section: Top of Utah - Weber; Page: 1WB

# More of Utah's children insured, study says

By JAMIE LAMPROS

## Standard-Examiner correspondent

SALT LAKE CITY — Last year, approximately 302,400 Utahns lacked health insurance coverage, but many fewer children were uninsured than in previous years.

"I'm pleasantly surprised that we actually gained ground in insuring Utah's children in 2009," said Utah Department of Health executive director Dr. David Sundwall.

"The Legislature has done the right thing by ensuring kids have access to these public programs despite the struggling economy. These programs are serving their purpose of making sure that children have access to needed medical care when times are tough."

The preliminary figures from the Utah Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System, released Wednesday by the Utah Department of Health, show 10.8 percent of Utahns were uninsured in 2009 compared with 10.7 percent in 2008 and 10.6 percent in 2007.

The final data will be released next month.

However, the figures show a modest increase of 4,200 uninsured from 2008 but less than the 306,500 uninsured observed in 2006.

The number of uninsured children ages 18 and younger fell 27.9 percent, from 75,900 to 54,700, between 2008 and 2009.

The number of uninsured adults ages 19 to 64 increased 10.4 percent.

Keeping the Children's Health Insurance Program open for enrollment throughout 2009 helped to keep children covered during the economic crisis, according to the report.

In 2008, legislation was passed letting UDOH keep CHIP enrollment open year-round, something that hadn't been done since 2001 because of funding restraints.

From December 2008 to December 2009, CHIP enrollment grew 11.6 percent, adding 4,334 children. The number of children in Medicaid grew 19.2 percent, adding 21,348 children, during the same period.

Kolbi Young, public relations and marketing director at UDOH, said as of Feb. 1, 804 Box Elder County children were enrolled in CHIP. Weber County has 3,006 children enrolled.

Davis County has 3,340 enrolled, and Morgan County has 94.

The Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System is a state-based, random-digit-dialed household telephone survey conducted by UDOH in partnership with the national Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

The report was released as part of Cover the Uninsured Week.

Also released this week was a report by The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, which showed more and more Utahns in the middle-class income bracket facing loss of health insurance.