



Department of *Public Health*

County of Riverside

Health Status Report
2001

Celebrating 75 Years of Service to the
Community

Acknowledgements

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This report will be available at the Riverside County Department of Public Health web site:

<http://www.rivcohsa.org/health/healthst.htm>

Executive Summary

This year celebrates seventy-five years of service for the Riverside County Department of Public Health. Our mission is to promote and protect the health of all County residents and visitors to achieve an improved health status throughout the community. This Health Status Report documents the vital statistics and health related data for the County of Riverside. This report brings the opportunity to review data from the close of the twentieth century, thus allowing comparisons between the County and California as well as to the national *Healthy People 2000* objectives. This will provide a vantage point for improving the health of our County residents in to the 21st century as well as providing a benchmark towards achieving the *Healthy People 2010* objectives. The following “*Key Points*” will touch upon the major findings where public health efforts will be necessary to continue progress as well as to rise to the challenge of emerging threats to the health status of the communities of our county:

- --- **Population:** Riverside County grew faster than any other California county greater than 250,000 population during the past decade, growing 32 percent to more than 1.5 million people. This continued the record growth rate that the County experienced between 1980 and 1990, when the population more than doubled. Currently ranking sixth in population in California, the County is projected to nearly triple between the year 2000 and 2040 to 4.5 million. The Hispanic population is projected to grow from approximately one third (36%) to more than half (52%) the County population. Unfortunately, despite recent improvements, the close of the twentieth century still found more than one in five of the general population in the county without health insurance.

--- **Live Births:** Since 1990, the birth rate in the County of Riverside has declined by 27%, similar to the national trend. More than half of the 23,536 live births in 1999 were Hispanic, a percentage that is projected to increase. Riverside County has seen improvement in several areas regarding maternal and infant health. Overall, the teen birth rate has declined; the percent of early entry into prenatal care has increased, yet improvement is needed for eliminating disparities among race/ethnicities. Moreover, the percentage of low birth weight births has remained static, despite greater access to prenatal care.

--- **Infant Mortality:** Deaths to infants under one year of age have declined dramatically since 1970. With the advances of technology and the innovation of the neonatal intensive care units (NICU), infant mortality has declined in the County as it has nationwide, with the 1999 infant death rate at all time lows in Riverside County meeting the “Healthy People 2000” goal. The new Healthy People 2010 goal presents a future challenge and calls upon Public Health and community efforts to continue progress in the reduction of this rate. Of greatest concern is the infant mortality rate for African American infants, which remains two to three times higher than any other racial/ethnic group. Most of the primary causes of infant mortality originate in the perinatal period, a further indication of the importance of access to timely and continuing prenatal care.

--- **Deaths:** In the early 20th century, infectious diseases were the leading cause of mortality. The close of this century finds chronic diseases as the main cause of death, with heart disease and cancer (malignant neoplasms) accounting for over half of the mortality in 1999 for residents of the County of Riverside. Cerebrovascular disease (stroke), unintentional injury, and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease accounted for 17 percent of deaths. These were the five leading causes of death in the County for 1999, which also were the leading causes for California, as well as the nation. Although rates have declined over the last decade, deaths due to coronary heart disease in the County remain above the California rate. Deaths due to AIDS, which entered the major cause of death ranks in the 1980's, dropped out of the "top ten" by 1999.

--- **Communicable Disease:** Reportable diseases registered in the County of Riverside totaled 6,599 in 1999. Since 1990, Chlamydia has been the most frequently reported disease in the County and, although the rate has increased over the last four years, it remains well below the California rate. Two other diseases of historical note, AIDS, and TB, also have declined in incidence due to aggressive public health and community interventions, and remain below California rates and *Healthy People 2000* goals. Rates for other diseases such as hepatitis A and B have also declined, as have the majority of the vaccine-preventable diseases. However, hepatitis C has rapidly risen to become the second most frequently reported disease, and is an emerging Public Health problem due to its communicability, debilitating health effects, costs to manage the disease including liver transplants, and lack of a cure or a vaccine to prevent the disease.

The health outcomes documented in birth and death rates and incidence of disease are affected by individual behavior and by a scope of socioeconomic factors which include income/poverty status and education/literacy abilities. In this regard, effective efforts to improve the health status of the residents of the County of Riverside will necessitate culturally appropriate promotion of positive health behaviors within the context of addressing poverty, promoting economic development, improving living conditions, ensuring access to care, and generating opportunities for learning - all done in partnership as ongoing community-driven efforts. I hope that this report will assist with the planning of health care services and with making policy decisions in public health. We are pleased to have this opportunity to present the Health Status of Riverside County Report, the first in a planned series of health status evaluations and assessments.

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