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HEALTH DEPARTMENT  
NEWS RELEASE



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## ***Kids Count In Michigan Report finds One in Five Children Live in Poverty in Kent County***

**GRAND RAPIDS** - More Kent County kids are growing up in families struggling to make ends meet, according to the newly-released **2013 Kids Count in Michigan** report. Data found 20.2 percent of children in Kent County living in poverty in 2011, up nearly 25 percent since 2005. Statewide, the child poverty rate increased 34 percent in that same time frame. The report is compiled by the Michigan League for Public Policy.

"Poverty can have a profound impact on children, affecting their ability to get healthy foods, their emotional well-being, and their general health," said Adam London, Administrative Health Officer of the Kent County Health Department. "The cycle of poverty in Kent County must be broken to give these children a chance to develop and mature into healthy adults." Kent County is doing slightly better than the state average: nearly 560,000 children, about one in every four in Michigan, lived in poverty in 2011.

Nearly one in three (32.5 percent) children ages 0-5 in Kent County received food assistance in 2012, up from 22.2 percent in 2005. That is better than the 37 percent statewide. This reflects a 53 percent increase in the rate of young children who qualified for federal food assistance between 2005 and 2012 statewide. Students eligible for free or reduced price school lunches in Kent County saw a dramatic increase in recent years: almost half (48.1 percent) qualified in 2012, compared to 38.6 percent in 2006.

The Kids Count report also found a big increase – 92 percent – in the number of children living in families investigated for abuse and neglect between 2005 and 2012 in Kent County. The report says 94.2 children per 1,000 children were living in homes that were investigated for abuse or neglect, slightly higher than the statewide average of 90 children per 1,000.

There was good news. Teen births to females ages 15-19 were down 16 percent, and infant mortality is down 21 percent, comparing data averaged from 2009-2011 versus data from 2003-2005. In education, fourth-grade reading scores improved 23 percent improvement, high school reading scores improved 11 percent in 2012 compared to 2008. Five percent more high school students graduated on time in 2011 than in 2007.

The Kids Count report ranks counties on 15 areas of child well-being. The statewide report found five dramatically worsening trends, all tied to eroding family economic security. Six areas showed improvements, while three remained about the same. For more on the findings and to see how other counties fared, go to [www.mlpp.org](http://www.mlpp.org).

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KCHD has been in the business of providing health services to Kent County since 1931. The Health Department is home to nearly 260 employees including public health nurses, sanitarians, health educators, technicians, public health administrators, and specialized staff at the Kent County Animal Shelter. The Health Department operates one main clinic and four satellite clinics located in Wyoming, Kentwood, Rockford, and Grand Rapids. To learn more about KCHD services, visit [www.accesskent.com/health](http://www.accesskent.com/health).