



Child Fatality Reviews

An approach to preventing child deaths

January 2012

ISSUE BRIEF

POLICY PERSPECTIVE

Over the past decade, Idaho's infant and child death rates have generally been higher than in the surrounding region and there is interest in bringing a child fatality review to Idaho.

Child fatality reviews investigate the underlying causes of preventable child deaths. This knowledge can guide scarce public resources to measures that can prevent future tragedies.

This research was funded by the Annie E. Casey Foundation. Idaho KIDS COUNT thanks the Foundation for its support but acknowledges that the findings and conclusions presented here do not necessarily reflect the opinions of the Foundation.

For more information, please visit www.idahokidscount.org.

The life of every child is precious. Child fatality reviews are one approach to keeping children safe from death and injury. Over the past decade, Idaho's infant and child death rates have generally been higher than in the surrounding region and there is interest in bringing a child fatality review to Idaho.

What is a child fatality review?

Child fatality reviews help us better understand how and why children die so that we can prevent future deaths. A state's vital statistics department might track a general cause of death, such as a 'drowning,' but typically collects limited information about the underlying risk factors and circumstances. Under a child fatality review, experts investigate the underlying causes of preventable child deaths and provide data and recommendations. States, local governments, nonprofits, communities, and families can then use this information to protect children and guide scarce resources to measures that can keep children safe and healthy.

Child fatality reviews are typically conducted by volunteer experts such as physicians, social workers, and law enforcement officials. In most states, a government agency (e.g. health department) usually coordinates the process. Child fatality reviews have been initiated in 49 states and the District of Columbia.

What are the results of child fatality reviews in states like Idaho?

Examining the outcomes of child fatality reviews in Idaho's neighboring states can help us understand how a similar process would impact Idaho. Idaho KIDS COUNT partnered with Boise State University students to study the results of review processes in similar states. The team examined the six states surrounding Idaho and found that findings were largely used to create and improve educational programs implemented by both government agencies and nonprofits. Legislative responses were relatively rare.¹

The most common themes were motor vehicle safety, safe sleep practices for infants, drowning prevention, and bike safety. Example activities in surrounding states included:

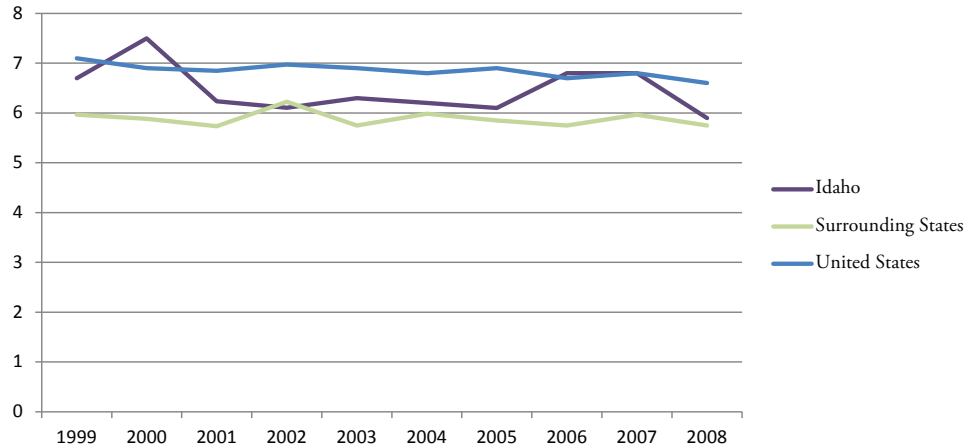
- promoting the use and correct installation of car seats
- raising awareness of the dangers of shaken baby syndrome
- distributing information to prevent drowning through direct-mail programs, pool and spa professionals, and local events involving water

Most of the six states have passed very few, if any, pieces of legislation that could be attributed to the child fatality review findings. Two of the six states, Nevada and Washington did not pass any legislation. Montana and Wyoming each passed one piece of legislation. Utah passed two laws. Oregon passed the most legislation, with seven laws. Legislation ranged from graduated driver's licensing, establishment of a suicide task force, banning of toy-like novelty lighters, and stricter sentences for driving-under-the-influence offenses involving children.

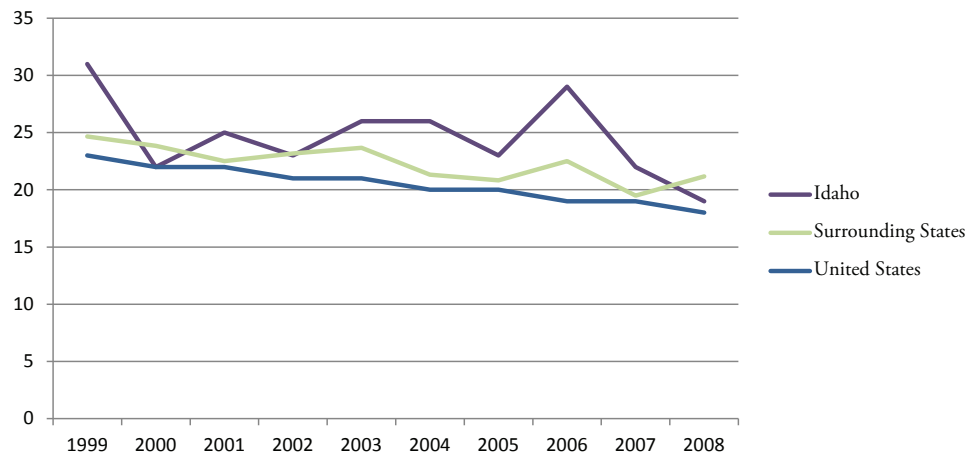
Child death rates in Idaho

Idaho's infant mortality rate has generally been higher than in surrounding states and is sometimes above and sometimes below the U.S. rate. Idaho's child death rates have generally been higher than in surrounding states and the nation. In Idaho, teen death rates (not shown) have no clear trend, as compared to surrounding states and U.S. rates.²

Infant Mortality Rates (deaths per 1,000 live births)



Child Death Rates (deaths per 100,000 children ages 1-14)



History of child fatality review in Idaho

Idaho previously had a child fatality review process that issued annual reports on deaths occurring from 1997 to 2000. The review team was disbanded in 2003 due to inadequate resources, difficulty in accessing needed records, and the expiration of Governor's Executive Order 98-10, which established the review team. Since that time there has not been an established process or structure for the review of deaths of Idaho children.

Child advocates are interested in reinstating Idaho's child fatality review and estimate the cost at \$45,000 per year.

Notes:

1. This summary includes legislation and educational activities uncovered by a student research team through research and interviews with state officials. The list may not be exhaustive and some might dispute whether the legislation was a direct result of the child fatality review.
2. Infant mortality, child, and teen death rates accessed on the KIDS COUNT Data Center. Available at: <http://datacenter.kidscount.org/>.



Idaho KIDS COUNT
1607 W. Jefferson Street
Boise, ID 83702
Phone: (208) 388-1014
Fax: (208) 331-0267
www.idahokidscount.org