

CDC says life expectancy in US up, deaths not

by MIKE STOBBE
AP Medical Writer

ATLANTA—US life expectancy has risen to a new high, now standing at nearly 78 years, the government reported Wednesday, Aug. 19. The increase is due mainly to falling death rates in almost all the leading causes of death. The average life expectancy for babies born in 2007 is nearly three months greater than for children born in 2006.

The new US data is a preliminary report based on about 90 percent of the death certificates collected in 2007. It comes from the National Center for Health Statistics, part of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Life expectancy is the period a child born in 2007 is expected to live, assuming mortality trends stay constant. US life expectancy has grown nearly one and a half years in the past decade, and is now at an all-time-high.

Last year, the CDC said US life expectancy had inched above 78 years. But the CDC recently changed how it calculates life expectancy, which caused a small shrink in estimates to below 78.

The United States continues to lag behind about 30 other countries in estimated life span. Japan has the longest life expectancy—83 years for children born in 2007, according to the World Health Organization.

The CDC report found that the number of deaths and the overall death rate dropped from 2006—to about 760 deaths per 100,000 people from about 776. The death rate has been falling for eight straight years, and is half of what it was

60 years ago. Heart disease and cancer together are the cause of nearly half of US fatalities. The death rate from heart disease dropped nearly 5 percent in 2007, and the cancer death rate fell nearly 2 percent, according to the report.

The HIV death rate dropped 10 percent, the biggest one-year decline in 10 years. "It was kind of a surprise to see it go down so much" and it's unclear if it will be a one-year fluke or not, said Bob Anderson, chief of the agency's mortality statistics branch.

The diabetes death rate fell about 4 percent, allowing Alzheimer's disease to surpass diabetes to become the sixth leading cause of death. Alzheimer's has been climbing the death chart in recent years, though that may be partly because declines in other causes are enabling more people to live long enough to die from Alzheimer's, Anderson said.

The nation's infant mortality rate rose slightly in 2007, to 6.77 infant deaths per 1,000 births, but the rise was not statistically significant. It has been at about the same level for several years.

That's not a shock, some experts said. Medical care improvements can improve infant survival, but they also mean that some troubled pregnancies now make it to infancy before death, said Paul Terry, an assistant professor of epidemiology at Atlanta's Emory University.

Another recent CDC report containing early data for 2008 counted 2.45 million deaths last year. That's an increase of more than 29,000 deaths from the 2.42 million deaths in 2007. ■

FACT CHECK

Health overhaul myths taking root

by CALVIN WOODWARD
AP Writer

WASHINGTON—The judgment is harsh in a new poll that finds Americans worried about the government taking over health insurance, cutting off treatment to the elderly and giving coverage to illegal immigrants. Harsh, but not based on facts.

President Barack Obama's lack of a detailed plan for overhauling health care is letting critics fill in the blanks in the public's mind. In reality, Washington is not working on "death panels" or nationalization of health care.

To be sure, presenting Congress and the country with the nuts and bolts of a revamped system of health insurance is no guarantee of success for a president—just ask Bill and Hillary Rodham Clinton. Their famous flop was demonized, too. After all, the devil does lurk in details.

It can also lurk in general-

ties, it seems.

Obama is promoting his changes in something of a vacuum, laying out principles, goals and broad avenues, some of which he's open to amending. As lawmakers sweat the nitty gritty, he's doing a lot of listening, and he's getting an earful.

A new NBC News poll suggests some of the myths and partial truths about the plans under consideration are taking hold.

Most respondents said the effort is likely to lead to a "government takeover of the health care system" and to public insurance for illegal immigrants. Half said it will probably result in taxpayers paying for abortions and nearly that many expected the government will end up with the power to decide when treatment should stop for old people.

A look at each of those points:

The Poll: 45 percent said it's

likely the government will decide when to stop care for the elderly; 50 percent said it's not likely.

The Poll: 55 percent expect the overhaul will give coverage to illegal immigrants; 34 percent don't.

The Poll: 54 percent said the overhaul will lead to a government takeover of health care; 39 percent disagree.

The Poll: 50 percent expect taxpayer dollars will be used to pay for abortions; 37 percent don't.

Obama has stated that the US should continue its tradition of "not financing abortions as part of government-funded health care." Current laws prohibiting public financing of abortion would stay on the books.

Yet abortion guidelines are not yet clear for the government-supervised insurance exchange. There is strong sentiment in Congress on both sides of the issue. ■



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