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Kansas seeks to boost immunizations
BY ALAN BAVLEY

Kansas health officials are expected to announce today plans for boosting the state's low childhood vaccination rates.

According to the most recent data, Kansas ranks 43rd among states nationwide, with just 77.5 percent of its 19- to 35-month-old children fully vaccinated in 2004.

"Basically, Kansas has been going sideways in the past 10 years in the immunization business," said Roger Martin of the Kansas Health Institute. "Kansas has flat-lined and the rest of the nation has been going up."

The national goal for 2010 set by the Department of Health and Human Services is 90 percent vaccinated.

The health institute and the Kansas Department of Health and Environment have put together a steering committee with representatives from the governor's office, state agencies and statewide health organizations to guide research into why vaccination rates are low and to come up with proposals for getting more children immunized.

Their multi-year Immunize Kansas Kids project is funded by the Kansas Health Foundation in Wichita.

Among the problems the committee probably will address:

Children in Kansas are less likely than those in other states to receive their shots from their family doctor; many must rely on public clinics for vaccinations.

The highest vaccination rates are in sparsely populated rural counties; rates are lower in the state's urban counties, including Wyandotte and Johnson.

The shot that children in Kansas are most likely to miss by their second birthday is the fourth in the series that protects against diphtheria, tetanus and pertussis.

A study commissioned by the Immunize Kansas Kids project recommends using a computerized registry to track vaccinations and remind parents when their children are due for shots.

Kansas has begun to create such a registry.

The report also recommends better coordination of immunizations with the Women, Infants and Children program, a health and nutrition program for low-income mothers and their children.