

The actions of the mother before and during pregnancy may also contribute to low birthweight. The March of Dimes (2002) recommends that women planning pregnancy should:

- ✓ Have a pre-pregnancy checkup;
- ✓ Consume a multivitamin containing 400 mg. of the B vitamin folic acid every day before and in the early months of pregnancy;
- ✓ Stop smoking;
- ✓ Stop drinking alcohol and/or using illicit drugs or prescription or over-the-counter drugs not prescribed by a doctor aware of the pregnancy.

Once pregnant, the March of Dimes (2002) further recommends that the mother:

- ✓ Get early, regular prenatal care;
- ✓ Eat a balanced diet with enough calories, usually about 300 more per day than the female normally eats;
- ✓ Gain enough weight. Between 25 and 35 pounds is recommended for women of normal weight.

## Immunization Completion Rates for Tennessee 24-Month-Old Children

1995 to 2001



Source: Tennessee Department of Health, Immunization Program. Note: Completion rates are based on four doses of DTaP/DT, three doses of polio, and one dose of MMR.

## Immunizations

Most children in Tennessee today survive childhood. That is not remarkable, but in medieval times, an estimated one third to one half of children failed to live past the early years. Immunizations against deadly and debilitating diseases are significant factors in increasing life expectancy by 30 years during the 20<sup>th</sup> Century and are considered one of the top 10 health advances of the century.

Immunization is a cost-effective public health expense. The Centers for Disease Control estimated that every \$1 invested in polio vaccine saved \$3.40 in direct medical costs and \$2.74 in indirect societal costs; every \$1 invested in measles vaccine saved \$10.30 in direct medical costs and \$3.20 in indirect societal costs (1999). An average of more than 16,000 people were paralyzed and nearly 2,000 people died due to polio during each of the four years prior to the introduction of the polio vaccine in 1955. Only seven years later, fewer than 100 cases were reported.

Although Tennessee has made great strides in immunization, work is still needed. Nearly 80,000 babies were born in Tennessee in 2000. Under current standards they should each be given 15-19 doses of vaccine by the age of 18 months to be protected against 11 childhood diseases (CDC, 1999).

In 2001, Tennessee reached its highest rate of completion for 24-month-old for DtaP/Td (diphtheria, tetanus, and pertussis, or whooping cough), polio, and MMR (measles, mumps, and rubella) at 88.2 percent. However, the state has still failed to achieve its goal of 90 percent completion.

Although vaccinations are available at local health department offices, only 16 percent children received their shots there. TennCare families had completion rates lower than privately insured children; however, the difference (86.3 percent compared to 90.4 percent) is less than half the 20 percent disparity that existed in the Medicaid program that preceded TennCare (DOH, 2002). The DOH has successfully used the Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) program to