



## State Budget Cuts Jeopardize America's Health

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Shrinking state health department budgets, brought on by the current economic downturn, are forcing cuts in critical public health programs and reductions in workforce that will have wide ranging effects. This is according to a recent survey of state and territorial health agencies, conducted by the [Association of State and Territorial Health Officials](#) (ASTHO).

Drastic budget cuts across the states have resulted in

- Limitations on eligibility for [Maternal and Child Health](#) services such as newborn screening and Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children ([WIC](#)) programs.
- Cuts in the scope of [childhood vaccination programs](#), despite the fact that in 2008 the United States had the highest number of measles cases in more than a decade and is seeing growing outbreaks of other vaccine preventable diseases such as pertussis.
- Elimination of [disease prevention programs](#) for HIV, Hepatitis C, and other infectious diseases, which impedes the ability to respond to emergencies such as meningitis outbreaks.
- Cuts in [teen pregnancy prevention programs](#), although the United States saved about \$6.8 billion in health care, public assistance and other costs in 2004 alone, due to a decline in teen birth rates.

"In difficult economic times health departments are challenged to do even more to protect the public's health," said ASTHO President and Indiana health commissioner Judith Monroe, MD. "Without adequate staff and other resources we can't help people stay healthy. And, when they do fall sick or are threatened with floods, fires, or bioterrorism, we cannot effectively respond. Protecting America's health must be a top priority."

"Immediate federal investments in state and local health department workforce, technology, and infrastructure would enable state health agencies to continue to protect the public's health, reduce Medicaid and Medicare expenditures, and provide much needed stimulus at all levels of the economy," said ASTHO Executive Director, Paul Jarris, MD.

### According to the ASTHO survey:

- Nearly 30% of states' FY08 health department budgets were cut below their FY07 level.
- Almost two-thirds of state health departments expect FY09 budgets to be cut below their FY08 level.
- All health departments that weathered cuts in FY08 expect further cuts in FY09.
- 22% of health departments expect at least a cut of at least 10% for FY09.
- Federal dollars make up about half of the average state's public health budget.

Public health departments are as critical a piece of the nation's infrastructure as roads and bridges. If the United States is to safeguard the health and vitality of its people, immediate investments in public health, as in all aspects of our infrastructure, are needed.

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