

NEWS RELEASE

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MISSOURI EARNS C FOR ITS SUPPORT OF EMERGENCY PATIENTS ON NATIONAL REPORT CARD ON STATE OF EMERGENCY MEDICINE

STATE RANKS 23RD IN THE NATION, NEARLY FAILS PUBLIC HEALTH & INJURY PREVENTION

Jefferson City, MO — With substantial achievements in disaster preparedness offset by a near-failing grade for public health and injury prevention, Missouri received an overall grade of C for its support of emergency patients on the American College of Emergency Physicians' (ACEP) *National Report Card on the State of Emergency Medicine*. The Report Card comes at the time when the national picture looks bleak: job and insurance losses, a rapidly growing senior population and a recent survey forecasting critical shortages of primary care doctors all point to escalating emergency patient populations.

“This Report Card is an important tool for us to use in the field of public health because it points to the long way we have to go in Missouri with regards to making healthier lifestyle choices and taking better care of ourselves,” said Robert Poirier, MD, president of the Missouri Chapter of ACEP. “As the economy goes through a very tough period, we can expect the emergency departments in our state and across the country to become even more vital to the nation’s overall health.”

The poor showing in the area of Public Health & Injury Prevention (national rank 42nd) is due to a number of low national rankings for Missouri in important public safety issues: traffic fatalities (37th); seat belt use (40th); percentage of traffic fatalities that are alcohol-related (41st); and unintentional injuries due to fires or burns (40th), falls (38th) and firearms (37th). In addition, Missouri’s infant mortality rate is higher than the national average, as is the state’s obesity rate. Missouri also has a greater percentage of adults who smoke cigarettes than the nation as a whole (23.2 percent vs. 20.1 percent).

Missouri’s highest grade of B was in the category of Disaster Preparedness, where the state ranked 18th in the nation. Missouri has a number of important programs in place including an all-hazards medical response plan, as well as a written plan specifically for patients with special needs. The state also ranks among the top five states in the country for per capita burn unit beds and ICU beds. The report also notes Missouri has the third-highest rates nurses registered in the state-based Emergency System for Advance Registration of Volunteer Health Professionals (ESAR-VHP), although there are no physicians in the program.

Missouri earned C’s in both Access to Emergency Care, the most heavily weighted category in the report, and Quality & Patient Safety Environment. Missouri ranked 18th in the nation in Access to Emergency Care due in part to the state’s relatively high capacity for care: it is second in the nation for psychiatric care beds and sixth in the nation for accredited chest pain centers. The report also notes the state has higher than average rates of staffed inpatient beds, as well as a relatively low daily hospital occupancy rate. The Quality & Patient Safety Environment grade was due to a mixed bag of higher and lower marks. The state does have a funded EMS director, yet no funding for future improvements within the system.

Finally, Missouri received another C grade for its Medical Liability Environment. The report notes that Missouri has contemplated many medical liability reforms, although not all have been enacted. The state lacks additional liability protections for federally mandated emergency care and requirements regarding the specialty or licensing of expert witnesses.

“Medical liability reform is crucial in Missouri to encourage more specialists to take call in the emergency department,” said Dr. Poirier. “If you need the care of a specialist and none is available, you may be transferred a long way to get the care you need. This delay can be dangerous or even life-threatening.”

The recommendations of the Missouri Report Card include:

- Greater investment in injury prevention and health promotion activities to encourage positive lifestyle changes such as smoking cessation, healthy eating and physical activity.
- Enactment of greater medical liability reforms.
- Increasing the number of physicians registered in ESAR-VHP.
- Increasing recruitment and retention efforts for medical specialists and specialty service providers, particularly in areas of mental health and substance abuse.

“The weakened economy combined with a failing health care system mean that growing numbers of people will need emergency care,” said Dr. Nick Jouriles, president of ACEP. “In fact, the role of emergency care has never been more critical to this nation, which is why emergency patients must become a top priority for health care reform. We are urging President-elect Obama and the new Congress to strengthen emergency departments, because they are a health care safety net for us all.”

The nation’s failure to support emergency patients resulted in a C- for the country overall. Massachusetts earned the highest overall grade of a B and Arkansas ranked last (51st) in the nation with a D-. The national grade was calculated using the same methodology used for the overall state grades and is a weighted average of the nation’s category grades.

The grades are from ACEP’s *National Report Card on the State of Emergency Medicine*, a comprehensive analysis of the support that states provide for emergency patients. The new Report Card contains more than twice the measures of ACEP’s first Report Card in 2006, as well as a new category for disaster preparedness, which makes it more comprehensive, although not directly comparable to the previous Report Card.

The five Report Card categories (and weightings) are: Access to Emergency Care (30 percent), Quality and Patient Safety Environment (20 percent), Medical Liability Environment (20 percent), Public Health and Injury Prevention (15 percent) and Disaster Preparedness (15 percent).

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The Missouri Chapter of ACEP is a state chapter of the American College of Emergency Physicians, a national medical specialty society representing emergency medicine with more than 27,000 members. ACEP is committed to advancing emergency care through continuing education, research and public education. Headquartered in Dallas, Texas, ACEP has 53 chapters representing each state, as well as Puerto Rico and the District of Columbia. A Government Services Chapter represents emergency physicians employed by military branches and other government agencies.

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