If you were born in Pittsburgh 100 years ago, your health outcomes would have been very different from today. In 1920, Pittsburgh had the world's highest recorded infant mortality rate of any major city. Rates were even higher for African-American children, who were at least twice as likely to die before their fifth birthday. Now in 2011, thanks to antibiotics, vaccines, and other interventions, like expectancy and overall health have vastly improved for all young citizens. Unfortunately, for African-American children, the gaps have not nearly as great as for Whites. According to the latest Allegheny County figures, Black infants lead all other groups in infant death rates (see figure). These disparities continue throughout childhood and have spurred numerous campaigns to improve health in the African-American community and narrow the racial social gap. To better understand the issue, we talked with Elizabeth Miller, MD, PhD, associate professor of pediatrics at the University of Pittsburgh School of Medicine and chief of the Division of Adolescent Medicine at Children's Hospital of Pittsburgh at UPMC. Dr. Miller, what are some of the major health disparities between Black and White children and adolescents? EM: Widespread disparities in health exist locally, nationally, and for just about every health indicator—from low birth weight, infant mortality and teenage pregnancy to asthma, obesity, diabetes and asthma. Unfortunately, there has been a decade in teens pregnancy among African-American women of all ages, although this decrease is smaller than for Whites.

why should we care? EM: Health and wellness are closely linked to improved employment and reduced violence in a young person’s life. More attention towards the health of young people, especially during the formative years of school, can help prevent long-term health problems associated with poor dietary habits, drug and alcohol use, and early sexual activity. What are the root causes? EM: Historically, many African American families have confronted barriers, including poverty, which limited access to quality care and limited education and employment opportunities. How can we begin to address the problems of health disparity? EM: The statistics may appear daunting and disheartening, but we need to examine these profound disparities from the perspective of community actions and assets rather than from deficiencies. Many researchers, for example, are focusing on creating programs that encourage children to play, establishing family centers, or creating playgrounds. At the neighborhood level, service providers can clearly show that good health care can improve growth and development in young people. Many advances, significant barriers to adequate health care for African American population. Key action steps to mobilize resources and community programs and partnerships such as the one among the University of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania Urban League of Greater Pittsburgh, and the Alianza Hispana’s Urban League and the Community Health Improvement Partnership, are working to improve the health and safety of children.

The University of Pittsburgh Clinical and Translational Science Institute (CTSI) Mobile Lab program brings original, hands-on learning opportunities to middle and high schools in and around Pittsburgh. All CTSI Mobile Labs involve use of the same U.S. M.I.T. mobile learning Lab, in which students participate in designing and conducting a research project. The approaches vary, but all incorporate student-designed projects and involve teachers, students, and community members in research processes. As a part of CTSI’s CBPR grant program, CTSI’s CBPR grant program, is led by Arlene Pardini, PhD, from the Department of Health and the Urban League of Greater Pittsburgh, and community partner researchers, including the Pennsylvania State University, are working to develop public health interventions that are appropriate for specific communities.

A YOUNGSTER PARTICIPATES IN VISUAL VOICES, SUMMER 2011

ESTHER BUSH

Tackling concussion head on

School is back in session, and with it comes another key time in people’s lives—football season. Keeping young people safe while participating in these activities is a priority for the University of Pittsburgh. As a result, the University of Pittsburgh researchers are working with partners in the community, healthcare providers and schools in order to study concussions and concussive activities, and create a tool that will help in the recognition and understanding of the disease. For more information, please contact

Contact person: Dr. Jennifer McIver

University of Pittsburgh School of Medicine

The new CTSI Mobile Lab is a great way for students to get involved in scientific research and learn new skills, and the partnership between the University of Pittsburgh, the Western Pennsylvania Youth Coalitions, and the University of Pittsburgh’s Department of Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation, is creating a new opportunity for cutting edge research in the area of youth health and on the playing field.

The CTSI Mobile Lab is built around the idea of creating an educational experience that is both exciting and engaging. The mobile lab is designed to be a hands-on educational experience that is both fun and interactive. The lab is equipped with a variety of tools and equipment, including microscopes, microscopes, microscopes, and microscopes. The lab also features a variety of educational programs, such as after-school programs, summer camps and workshops for children at Pitt Panther football games throughout the season.