

Report: 47 percent of Baltimore's poor without health insurance

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More than 80 percent of Baltimore's low-income families said they were without health insurance at some point in the recent past, according to a new survey.

Almost half of those who lacked insurance said they had to stop taking medication and stop seeing their doctors because of their lack of insurance, and a significant number said they had to visit emergency rooms for preventative care.

Researchers from the Open Society Institute-Baltimore and the Baltimore Community Health Consortia interviewed 298 Baltimore residents between June and July of this year for the survey. The results were to be released this morning at a press conference in Baltimore. According to the survey:

- 47 percent of those surveyed were without health insurance
- 82 percent had recently been uninsured, and 42 percent of those stopped receiving treatment during that time.
- More than half said they were in medical debt, with an average debt per person of \$8,655.
- Nearly a third said they waited four weeks or less for medical assistance after applying, but 24 percent said they waited between four months and a year.

Dr. Thomas O'Toole, a program officer at the Open Society Institute-Baltimore, said the survey should be a "wake-up call" that the medical system is broken. He said the survey -- conducted for the third straight year -- indicates health insurance may be getting more difficult to find for Baltimore's low-income families.