Birth, marriage, death, disease, and accidents are among the vital statistics collected to help measure the health and well-being of the population. Decatur County had 317 births in 1996, a change of -79 births from five years earlier in 1992 (-19.9 percent decrease). Of those live births, 35 were to teen mothers under age 20 — or 11.0 percent of all births in the county. Most births occurred to women between the ages of 20 to 29 (60.9 percent) and 30 to 39 (26.5 percent). There were 5 births to women age 40 and older in 1996, and 3 in 1992. The number of teen pregnancies in 1995 was 61, compared to 68 (17.7 percent) in 1990. There were 223 marriages in 1996, and 231 in 1990.

Among Decatur County two-year old children in 1996, 90 percent had been fully immunized. Decatur County had 240 deaths in 1996. Of those deaths, 87 (36.2 percent) were due to heart disease and 50 (20.8 percent) due to cancer. Motor vehicle accidents claimed 7 lives in 1996.

Sadly, in fiscal year 1997, 68 Decatur County children were reported abused and 91 neglected; of those, 10 were substantiated as physical abuse, 16 as sexual abuse, and 23 as neglect. The percent of cases substantiated was 38.2 percent for abuse and 25.3 percent for neglect. The rate of abuse and neglect per 1,000 children under age 18 in Decatur County was 7.2 in 1997, compared to 11.9 in 1996.

Questions to ponder...
Are low-cost health services such as immunization for children available to the working poor? What programs can help children and teens at risk? Are services available to help mothers of newborns? Do schools or other organizations provide education to children on drug and alcohol abuse? Is there a safety-net available to abuse victims?