

IMMIGRANT PRENATAL CARE SUBSIDIZED

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Body

California will provide state-**subsidized prenatal care** for illegal **immigrants** under a bill signed by the governor Thursday and announced Monday.

Gov. Gray Davis also signed a bill expanding Healthy Families, the state's health insurance program for poor children.

"These bills will ensure that more of our most vulnerable kids get access to health **care**," Davis said in a written statement.

Davis signed the **prenatal-care** bill days after a state appeals court rejected his fourth attempt to delay a court hearing in a lawsuit in which he is the defendant.

The **prenatal-care** program eliminates the thorniest immigration issue Davis has faced since he sidestepped a decision on Proposition 187 -- a voter-approved ban on most public services for illegal **immigrants** -- earlier this year. Davis sent the illegal-immigration measure to a federal mediator, where it remains.

Although illegal **immigrants** are ineligible for most publicly funded health **care**, California provides **prenatal care** under Medi-Cal for all needy women, including about 70,000 illegal **immigrants**.

Davis' predecessor, Republican Gov. Pete Wilson, sought to make pregnant illegal **immigrants** ineligible for such benefits.

State courts blocked Wilson's effort. He appealed, and when Davis took office in January, he became the defender of the policy.

By signing the bill funding the **prenatal care**, Davis could kill lawsuits on the matter, said John Affeldt, the lead counsel in the one of the cases that challenged Wilson's attempt to block the assistance. A regulation cutting off the aid remains on the state books, Affeldt said. If Davis removes the regulation, Affeldt will drop the lawsuit, and he predicted his counterparts in two similar lawsuits would do likewise.

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