



NCHS Update

National Committee on Vital and Health Statistics
February 23, 2006



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Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
National Center for Health Statistics



Two Topics

- **Data Release and Confidentiality Issues for Vital Statistics**
- **Board of Scientific Counselors Review of Mortality Vital Statistics**

Data Release and Confidentiality Issues for Vital Statistics

Data Release and Confidentiality Issues for Vital Statistics

Review of Current Policy

Data Release and Confidentiality

- No known breach of confidentiality to date under NCHS' current data release policy – however,
- Jurisdictions asked NCHS to review the current policy because of concerns that the NCHS policy is at variance with either
 - State laws and/or
 - State regulations and/or
 - State practices

Current Policy for Data Release NCHS Vital Statistics

- Public Use File includes individual record data with all variables, with these restrictions:
 - No exact dates provided; instead:
 - Age of parents/decedent
 - Month and year of event
 - Geography limited to counties and cities of 100,000+ population
- No restrictions on access to Public Use File; available to anyone

Current Data Release Policy, cont.

- Special Requests: For custom data sets, including unit records with smaller geographic units and/or exact dates, are reviewed on individual basis:
 - For Federal agencies, a signed data user agreement is required
 - For non-Federal requests, researchers are referred to NCHS' [Research Data Center](#)

NCHS Research Data Center

- Researchers whose requests for individual-level files are not approved, or who request exact dates, may use facilities of NCHS's Research Data Center (RDC);
- RDC allows access for a fee to detailed data in a secure environment with stand-alone computer at NCHS that controls confidentiality; output is inspected and no confidential data leave NCHS premises.

Other Access to Vital Statistics Data – NOT Unit Record Data

- Pre-aggregated data for all counties, the Compressed Mortality File (CMS), available on CD-ROM for each year since 1979;
- Aggregated birth and death data available in WONDER, CDC's interactive internet web site, and in other Federal data access systems.

Issue

- Jurisdictions asked NCHS to review the current policy because of concerns that the NCHS policy is at variance with either
 - State laws and/or
 - State regulations and/or
 - State practices

NCHS Proposal: 4 Types of Releases

- Aggregated public-use data file, such as Compressed Mortality File on CDC's **WONDER** internet system
- Individual-level **NATIONAL** public-use data file with no geographic detail (no State, county, or city identifiers) or exact dates
- Customized individual-level file for Federal agencies with approved research proposals
- Customized individual-level file for non-Federal researchers with approved research proposals

Proposed: Aggregated Public-Use Birth and Death files: WONDER

- CDC's interactive web-system WONDER extracts data from NCHS's Compressed Mortality File (CMF), including **death** files since 1979
- WONDER provides aggregate **death** counts/rates for all counties, but suppresses cells ≤ 5 for single-year data and county population $< 100,000$
- Aggregated **birth** data available now on WONDER, using individual-level natality files
- WONDER provides aggregate **birth** data for counties $\geq 100,000$ population

Proposed: New Public-use Data File (PUF)

- Continues to include individual-level data
- Include all items and detail in the current PUF except for geography
 - National file only—no State, county, or city identifiers
- Available for births, deaths, fetal deaths, linked birth/infant death

Proposed: Custom Individual-level Files for Non-federal Researchers

- Researcher provides proposal and signed Data User Agreement
- Proposal review by NCHS committee, including NAPHSIS representative with veto power
- Customized individual-level file for specific project—may include all State, county, and city codes, as needed and approved, but not exact dates
- Return files to NCHS within one year unless renewal is requested and approved

Custom Individual-level Files for Federal Agencies

- Federal agency provides proposal and signed Data User Agreement
- Proposal review by NCHS committee, including NAPHSIS representative with veto power
- Customized individual-level file for specific project—may include exact dates and/or all State, county, and city codes, as needed and approved
- Return files to NCHS within one year unless renewal is requested and approved

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NAPHSIS Proposal

- Some jurisdictions have requested further limitations, for example:
 - Authority to restrict certain variables at the state level from the *National PUF* as well as from the compressed/aggregated files;
 - Exclude day of week
- NAPHSIS requests retroactive application of the policy to all public use data files
- Utility and value of the *National PUF* and the compressed files are under evaluation

Process Underway

- NAPHSIS' Statistics Committee is asking all individual jurisdictions for **copies** of laws, policies, regulations, and practices regarding data release and data re-release by Federal agencies
- NAPHSIS and NCHS will review documents to determine data release limitations and to develop mutually acceptable data re-release policy

NCHS Board of Scientific Counselors

Program Reviews

Mortality Statistics Branch Review

- Reviewed by a seven member outside panel
- Reported to the BSC January 26-27
- BSC will prepare recommendations to NCHS
- NCHS reviewing report of panel

Overarching Recommendations of Review Panel

- Improve data input quality and process
- Improve data access and dissemination
- Develop a specific analytic/research plan
- Strengthen collaborative efforts with other Federal agencies, states, and academic/research institutions

Overarching Recommendations, cont.

- Work with NAPHSIS and States to address issues of confidentiality, privacy and data release
- Appoint an ongoing working group to assist in strategic analytic plan development
- Take a 5-10 year perspective for implementation

Reproductive Statistics Branch Review

- Beginning immediately
- Same process of outside Panel reporting to BSC
- Anticipated report to BSC in September

