



# National Center for Health Statistics

## Overview

The National Center for Health Statistics (NCHS) is the nation's principal health statistics agency, providing data to identify and address health issues. NCHS compiles statistical information to help guide public health and health policy decisions. These health statistics allow us to:

- Document the health status of the U.S. population and selected subgroups
- Track the impact of major policy initiatives
- Document access to and use of the health care system
- Monitor trends in health indicators
- Support biomedical and health services research
- Identify disparities in health status and use of health care by race and ethnicity, socioeconomic status, other population characteristics, and geographic region
- Provide data to support public policies and programs, including recent data on opioid overdose deaths

## NCHS, a federal statistical agency

Underlying NCHS' mission and legislative mandate is the principle that the data collected with public funds, or under the umbrella of a public agency, are considered a "public good." The primary considerations for the timely release of NCHS data are:

- Protection of the confidentiality of respondents
- Accessibility of resources required to create public-use files and tabulations
- Data quality, analytic, or data processing issues that may limit the ability to make public-use data or tabulations available

In addition to providing data for public use, the agency works to provide objective, independent analysis and interpretation of the data it collects through reports and other statistical products.

## Health indicators

NCHS produces data on a wide range of health indicators that have important uses for public health, such as:

- Health insurance coverage and its relationship to access and the use of health care services.
- Prevalence of health conditions, such as obesity and overweight, cholesterol, hypertension, and HIV status among the U.S. population; these data have been used to develop guidelines for hypertension in children and guidelines for treatment of cholesterol.
- Exposure to environmental hazards that shape policy, such as exposure to lead.
- Physical activity and nutrition, information that is used to develop dietary guidelines.
- Growth charts that are used by health care providers to monitor the development of children.
- Patient safety and quality.
- Injuries and disabilities and their impact on health status and functioning.
- Leading causes of death specific to age, race, ethnicity, and gender groups; NCHS documented the rise in suicide, which can be used by CDC and other health-related

organizations to highlight the importance of prevention programs.

- Infant mortality, stillbirths, life expectancy, and teen births, including documenting the decrease in teen births for policy makers and programs.
- Practice of medicine in the United States and evolution of health information technology, such as the increased use of electronic health records and the ways providers use electronic health records to improve care.
- Changes in the health care delivery system, including emergency department use and capacity; increasing use of prescription drugs; and increasing demand for community-based long-term care.

## NCHS data sources

Collaborating with other public and private health partners, NCHS uses a variety of data collection mechanisms to obtain accurate information from multiple sources. This process provides a broad perspective to help us understand the population's health, influences on health, and health outcomes. Sources of data collection include:

- Birth and death certificates
- Patient medical records
- Personal interviews (in households and by phone)
- Standardized physical examinations and laboratory tests
- Health care facilities and providers

## New directions

As the nation's principal health statistics agency, NCHS is expanding the use of administrative data for statistical purposes to provide policy makers with more comprehensive and objective data, to provide better evidence for policy, budget, operational, and management decision-making. NCHS will continue identifying high-value public and private administrative data to supplement NCHS surveys and systems to achieve greater impact and efficiencies.

For more information about NCHS, visit <https://www.cdc.gov/nchs>.