

COVID-19 Alert No. 3
April 2, 2020

New Releases: Final Guidance and Provisional Death Counts

The National Center for Health Statistics (NCHS) has released [final guidance](#) to help with filling out death certificates for deaths related to COVID-19. Note that corrections have been made to this guidance, so please ensure you are using the most recent version.

NCHS will begin posting [provisional counts of deaths related to COVID-19](#) this Friday. National provisional counts include deaths occurring within the 50 states and the District of Columbia that have been received and coded by NCHS as of the date specified.

Provisional counts for COVID-19 deaths are based on a current flow of mortality data in the National Vital Statistics System (NVSS), and will include:

- A weekly provisional count of deaths in the United States due to COVID-19
- A provisional count of deaths from all causes
- Percent of previous year's deaths (the number of deaths received compared to the number of deaths expected based on data from previous years)
- Pneumonia deaths (excluding pneumonia deaths involving influenza)

Pneumonia deaths are included in the provisional counts because deaths due to COVID-19 may be misclassified as pneumonia deaths in the absence of positive test results, and pneumonia may appear on death certificates as a comorbid condition. Thus, increases in pneumonia deaths may be an indicator of excess COVID-19-related mortality.

Provisional counts will be presented by week ending date, by age at death, and by the specific jurisdiction where the death occurred. Counts will be updated daily Monday – Friday.

Important notes about provisional death counts

Almost all states have electronic death registration systems that enable rapid transmission of death certificate data to NCHS, which processes up to 80% of the death data it receives within minutes. However, because it can take up to several weeks for death records to be submitted as well as processed, coded, and tabulated, data are lagged by an average of 1-2 weeks.

Due to this, the data presented in the provisional counts may be incomplete and will likely not include all deaths that occurred during a given time period, especially for more recent time periods. Death counts for earlier weeks are continually revised and may increase or decrease as NCHS receives new and updated death certificate data from the states. As a result, COVID-19 provisional death counts may differ from other published sources.

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