

## Preparing Your Records: Record Layout and Coding Specifications

1. Records of study subjects must be created in a **standard TEXT FILE** (flat file) format.  
NOTE: DO NOT put any header lines or other extraneous information in the file. Only DATA should be in each file.
2. Each record must contain **exactly 100 positions** (containing letters, numbers, or blanks) and should have one carriage return (ENTER key) at the end. Limit file sizes to 500,000 records or less; this improves processing speeds. For file sizes larger than 500,000 records, contact NDI staff for current file size requirements.
3. To be **eligible** for an NDI search, each record must contain **at least one** of the following combinations of data items:
  - **FIRST and LAST NAME and SOCIAL SECURITY NUMBER**
  - **FIRST and LAST NAME and MONTH and YEAR OF BIRTH**
  - **SOCIAL SECURITY NUMBER and full DATE OF BIRTH and SEX**

These combinations of items are part of the NDI Edit requirements that determine whether a user's record has sufficient data to qualify for a search. These combinations should not be confused with the NDI matching criteria described on page 1 of Chapter 4.
4. **DO NOT USE ANY DELIMITERS SUCH AS TABS, COMMAS, OR ANY OTHER PUNCTUATION TO SEPARATE THE DATA ELEMENTS.**
5. Each data element must be entered in its specified positions. See Exhibit 1 for sample user records in the required record layout.
6. Refer to Exhibit 2 for the file format and coding specifications for each data element.
7. Coding instructions for **NAMES** appear in Exhibit 2A.
8. State codes appear in Exhibit 2B.
9. A separate **NDI Transmittal Form** must accompany **each** file submitted for an NDI search. A blank NDI Transmittal Form(s) containing your assigned NDI search numbers will be sent to you with the letter approving your NDI search. NOTE: A SEPARATE FILE must be created for each type of search: routine, unknown, known, and certificate, and similarly for the Early Release File.
10. Submit your records to us. Use your assigned NDI numbers in your file names. **NCHS requires that you password-protect your file(s) using any self-decrypting software.**
11. Send us your files, NDI Transmittal Form(s), fee worksheet, and proof of payment. Refer to "[How to Use the National Death Index: Steps in the Process.](#)" Proof of payment must be received by NCHS before you receive the NDI Search Results.
12. E-mail [ndi@cdc.gov](mailto:ndi@cdc.gov) to confirm that your file(s) was received. Include your NDI number and the date the file was sent. Be sure to include the password(s) to be used for opening your password-protected file(s).