

## NATIONAL VITAL STATISTICS SYSTEM

### WHAT IS THE PUBLIC HEALTH ISSUE?

Policymakers and program managers need information from vital records such as birth and death statistics to develop policy and direct public health programs. The National Vital Statistics System (NVSS) is the primary source of this information, producing the nation's official vital statistics. The collection and registration of vital events are governed by the laws of 57 states and registration areas. Vital records and reports originate with hospitals, physicians, and funeral directors. Records are then compiled by the states and forwarded to CDC, which works with the states to ensure consistency in certificate content, data quality, and timeliness of reporting.

### WHAT HAS CDC ACCOMPLISHED?

NVSS compiles data on issues of public health concern, such as the number of teen births, prenatal care and birth weight, risk factors for adverse pregnancy outcomes, infant mortality rates, leading causes of death, life expectancy, and firearm-related mortality. This information is then provided in a timely manner to public health officials at the national, state, and local levels, as well as to interested private sector groups.

#### *Examples of Program in Action*

NVSS has compiled the following data from national vital statistics:

- The teen birth rate declined by 30% over the past decade, from 61.8 births per 1,000 teens 15 to 19 years of age in 1991 to 43.0 in 2002.
- The data show a reduction in deaths due to heart disease (3.8%) and cancer (1.8%) from 2000 to 2001. These two diseases account for more than 1.2 million deaths, more than half of all deaths in 2001.
- Life expectancy at birth for white males was 75.0 years, and 68.6 for black males in 2001.
- The infant mortality rate for all races has declined from 9.2 infant deaths per 1,000 live births in 1990, to 6.8 in 2001.

### WHAT ARE THE NEXT STEPS?

To address 21st century data-needs with 21st century technology, CDC plans to invest in fundamental improvements in the nation's vital statistics system. These improvements will include

- Implementing new national model certificates of birth, death, and fetal death events to improve data quality and update the content of these data sources to reflect new needs such as changing classification of race/ethnicity, and new and emerging concerns in maternal and infant health and public health.
- Developing, in partnership with states, the National Association of Public Health Statistics and Information Systems, and the Social Security Administration, standard specifications for a re-engineered vital statistics system that harmonizes with the Public Health Information Network. This process involves the initial recording of birth, death, and fetal death records via electronic systems in hospitals and funeral homes using standardized guidelines developed by CDC's National Center for Health Statistics (NCHS); transmission to state authorities and NCHS; and translation into information systems for statistical analyses and public health surveillance.