

TITLE

Birth Defects—Data Availability and Other Factors Relevant to Environmental Public Health Tracking: Report Summary

THEME

Disseminate Credible Information to Guide Policy, Practice and Other Actions to Improve the Nation's Health

KEYWORDS

birth defects, surveillance, data quality and application

BACKGROUND

Birth defects have been identified as a health outcome of interest by the western states affiliated with the Berkeley Center for EPHT and CDC. In response, the Berkeley Center has prepared a report intended to provide information about birth defects and birth defects data relevant to this initiative. This presentation will provide a summary of the report.

OBJECTIVE(S)

The report goals were: 1) to review and summarize the current status of birth defects surveillance including the range of outcomes monitored, and the data sources and methods for estimating population burden; and, 2) to characterize the current surveillance, vital statistics, administrative, and survey data applicable to EPHT.

METHOD(S)

Data and other information summarized from the peer-reviewed literature, published governmental reports, non-governmental organizations, and data-generating agencies.

RESULT(S)

Several issues in birth defects monitoring may influence its application to EPHT and require sufficient understanding before applying and interpreting such outcomes. A few examples of multiple issues discussed in detail include: 1) The completeness and accuracy of birth defects reporting for specific defects by surveillance method influence the selection of defect types to track or link with exposure data; 2) The relative completeness of individual data items varies substantially with data source; 3) The availability and utilization of prenatal diagnosis and elective termination vary among populations, across geographic regions and over time; and 4) understanding that the availability of the legislative authority allowing reporting, the extent of data, and the linkage and dissemination of data within and between state databases varies the accessible level of the identifier, the geographic unit, and the population at risk.

DISCUSSION/RECOMMENDATION(S)

State programs considering birth defects as a tracking outcome must understand the characteristics of their current data that will influence uses (i.e., data completeness by defect type, baseline rates, time trends, county or smaller geographic

area-level assessments, cluster investigations, population-based research), as well as the additional technical, funding, and legislative requirements to expand identified data elements for utility in future specific EPHT goals.

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