

# Health Statistics: Measuring Our Nation's Health



What are the leading causes of death in the United States?\*

How many Americans smoke?\*

What percentage of children had one or more urgent care visits or retail health clinic visits?\*

Are drug-poisoning deaths increasing?\*

The National Center for Health Statistics (NCHS) collects data needed to answer these and many other key questions about health and health care in the United States. NCHS is part of the federal statistical system, which includes agencies that are responsible for compiling, analyzing, and disseminating data for statistical purposes.

## How does NCHS obtain data?

NCHS uses a variety of data collection mechanisms to fulfill its statutory mandate to obtain accurate statistics on a wide range of health issues. NCHS obtains data from all birth and death records filed in states and U.S. territories. NCHS also conducts national surveys based on samples designed to represent the U.S. population. Survey methods include:

- Personal interviews in households and by phone
- Standardized physical examinations, diagnostic procedures, dental examinations, and laboratory tests in mobile examination centers
- Review of facility information and patient medical records in hospitals, hospital emergency and outpatient departments, physicians' offices, nursing homes, home and hospice care agencies, and residential care facilities

## What data are produced?

NCHS produces data on a wide range of health indicators, such as:

- Accurate, relevant, and timely data to monitor and respond to the COVID-19 pandemic
- Births, such as teen, nonmarital, multiple, preterm, and low birthweight births
- Diseases and health conditions, such as obesity, diabetes, hypertension, cancer, heart disease, stroke, HIV/AIDS, lung diseases, osteoporosis, asthma, allergies, ADHD, arthritis, and pain

- Other health status measures, including injuries, disabilities, environmental exposures, oral health, vision, hearing, and mental health
- Health-related behaviors, such as smoking, physical activity, and alcohol use
- Nutrition and growth charts
- Preventive services, such as immunizations and cancer screening
- Reproductive health, including fertility, contraceptive use, and sexual behaviors
- Health insurance coverage and access to care
- Health care use and services delivered by hospitals, hospital emergency and outpatient departments, physicians' offices, nursing homes, home and hospice care agencies, and residential care facilities
- The health care system, including the use of health information technology and electronic medical records, changing patterns of service delivery, medications prescribed, and complications of care
- Deaths, including life expectancy, leading causes of death, fetal deaths, and infant mortality

**NCHS data—a vital public resource for health information—are used and disseminated by a wide range of organizations. To maintain and enhance this resource, NCHS must ensure that these data are relevant, accurate, timely, and accessible.**

\*The leading causes of death in 2019 were heart disease and cancer (the same as in 2018). The prevalence of current cigarette smoking among adults was 14.0% in 2019. In 2019, approximately one in four children had one or more urgent care or retail health clinic visits in the past 12 months (26.4%). In 2019, the age-adjusted rate of drug overdose deaths in the United States (21.6 per 100,000) was higher than in 2018 (20.7).

# How does NCHS assure data quality?

- By adopting the highest possible standards for survey design, questionnaire development, and data collection, processing, analysis, and dissemination.
- With a strong commitment to protecting the confidentiality of information collected, so gaining the trust of survey respondents and promoting accurate data.
- Through an active program in research and methodology to address significant issues related to survey design, such as how to use advances in technology and how to achieve high response rates, and to assure validity by verifying that survey questions obtain the information NCHS intends to measure.
- By collaborating with other agencies to assure that surveys include appropriate content and that data are analyzed and interpreted accurately, enhancing the value of data for all users.

## Who uses these data?

- Policymakers—to track implementation of health policies and programs, set priorities for research and prevention programs, and evaluate outcomes.
- Epidemiologists and researchers—to understand trends in health, health care delivery, risk factors, and outcomes.
- Businesses—to support health-related activities of manufacturing, marketing, and consulting firms and trade associations.
- Public health professionals—to identify and monitor health problems, risk factors, and disease patterns, and to assess the impact of interventions.
- Physicians—to evaluate health and risk factors of their patients (e.g., norms for cholesterol, body weight, blood pressure, and children's growth).
- Media and advocacy groups—to obtain accurate information to raise awareness of health issues.

Data are used to compare health indicators over time and across populations and geographic areas. Most data produced from NCHS surveys are national-level data; if sample sizes are large enough, state data can be produced. National, state, and county data are available on births and deaths.

## How are data disseminated?

- Through a comprehensive website featuring easy access to published reports and statistics as well as tutorials and interactive web tools to further support use of the data. NCHS produces a wide range of publications—from easily understandable Data Briefs to

more in-depth analyses and methodological studies—to meet different data needs.

- By making public-use data files available. Allowing users to work with these data for their own inquiries fosters valuable analyses that build on information presented in routine NCHS reports.
- Through Research Data Centers that provide secure access to detailed data while maintaining confidentiality of respondents.

All Data Briefs are available in an interactive, searchable, and sortable table format on the NCHS website.						
National Center for Health Statistics						
CDC > NCHS > Publications and Information Products						
Data Briefs						
National Health Statistics Reports	National Vital Statistics Reports	Vital and Health Statistics Series	Other Publications	Bibliographies Available on the NCHS Website	Citations for NCHS Publications and Electronic Media	Errata List
Lisitervs	Ordering Printed Publications	Get E-mail Updates	Data Visualization Gallery	EastStats	NHIC Early Release Program	MMWR QuickStats
Government Printing Office Bookstore	Related Sites	Get E-mail Updates	Data Visualization Gallery	EastStats	NHIC Early Release Program	MMWR QuickStats
All Years	All Months	All Authors	All Data Collection Systems	All Keywords	Clear search term	Reset to default view
Search Terms:	Date Brief Number	Year	Month	Authors	Collection System	Title
398	2021	February	Holly Hedgaard, M.D., Sally C. Curtin, M.A., and Margaret Warner, Ph.D.	National Vital Statistics System	Suicide Mortality in the United States, 1999–2019 (PDF – 445 KB)	intentional self-harm, means of suicide, firearm, suffocation, poisoning, National Vital Statistics System
397	2021	February	Nicholas Ainsel, M.P.H., and Edwin A. Wambogo, Ph.D., M.S., M.P.H., R.D.	National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey	Eats and Beverage Consumption Among Adults in the United States, 2015–2018 (PDF – 409 KB) (Visual Abstract)	diet, National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey, NHANES
396	2021	February	Debra J. Brody, M.P.H., Erica Fautz, and James Tsai, M.D., M.P.H.	National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey	Secondhand Smoke Exposure Among Non-smoking Adults in the United States, 2015–2018 (PDF – 466 KB)	tobacco, nicotine, cotinine, NHANES
395	2020	December	Kenneth D. Kochanek, M.A., Jiaquan Xu, M.D., and Elizabeth Arias, Ph.D.	National Vital Statistics System	Mortality in the United States, 2019 (PDF – 142 KB)	life expectancy, leading cause, National Vital Statistics System
394	2020	December	Holly Hedgaard, M.D., Aradiel M. Minino, M.P.H., and Margaret Warner, Ph.D.	National Vital Statistics System	Drug Overdose Deaths in the United States, 1999–2018 (PDF – 142 KB)	opioids, fentanyl, heroin, cocaine, methamphetamine, National Vital Statistics System Mortality File
393	2020	December	Lindsey I. Black, M.P.H., and Benjamin Zablotsky, Ph.D.	National Health Interview Survey	Urgent Care and Retail Health Clinic Utilization Among Children in the United States, 2015–2019 (PDF – 106 KB)	health care utilization, acute care, National Health Interview Survey (NHIS)
392	2020	November	Anne K. Driscoll, Ph.D., and Elizabeth C.W. Gregory, M.P.H.	National Vital Statistics System	Increases in Pregnancy Obesity in the United States, 2015–2019 (PDF – 515 KB)	National Vital Statistics System, body mass index, maternal factors
391	2020	November	Edwina A. Wambogo, Ph.D., M.S., M.P.H., R.D., Nicholas Ainsel, M.P.H., and Suruchi Mitra, Ph.D., D.Sc., and Cynthia L. Ogden, Ph.D., M.P.H.	National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey	Fruit and Vegetable Consumption Among Children and Adolescents in the United States, 2015–2018 (PDF – 414 KB)	diet, National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey (NHANES)
390	2020	November	Carla S. Zellay, Ph.D., Michael J. Danaher, Ph.D., Jacqueline W. Lucas, M.P.H., and Eric M. Connor, B.S.	National Health Interview Survey	Chronic Pain and High Impact Chronic Pain Among U.S. Adults, 2019 (PDF – 413 KB)	pain, health disparities, urban-rural, National Health Interview Survey (NHIS)
389	2020	November	Bryan Steerman, M.D., M.P.H., Nicholas Ainsel, M.P.H., Suruchi Mitra, Ph.D., D.Sc., and Craig M. Hale, M.D., M.P.H.	National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey	Special Diets Among Adults, 2015–2018 (PDF – 305 KB) (Visual Abstract)	weight loss, nutrition, NHANES
388	2020	October	Kimberly Daniels, Ph.D., and Joyce C. Abma, Ph.D.	National Survey of Family Growth	Current Contraceptive Status Among Women Aged 15–49, United States, 2012–2019 (PDF – 428 KB) (Visual Abstract)	pill, condom, LARC, National Survey of Family Growth
387	2020	October	Joyce A. Martin, M.P.H., Brad E. Hartigan, Ph.D., and Michael J. Danaher, Ph.D.	National Vital Statistics System	Births in the United States, 2012–2019 (PDF – 389 KB)	general fertility rates, prenatal care, Medicaid coverage, birth, National Vital