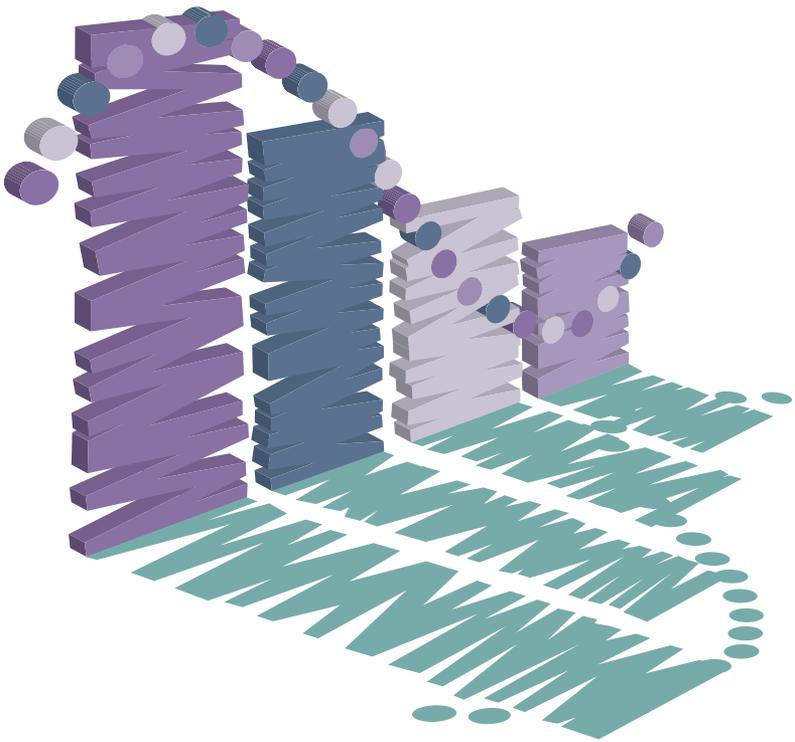


# Frequently Asked Questions

About the National Hospital Care Survey



*Sponsored by:*

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention  
National Center for Health Statistics

# Have questions about the National Hospital Care Survey? Here are some of the most common questions and their answers.

## 1. What is the National Hospital Care Survey?

The National Hospital Care Survey (NHCS) provides nationally representative data on inpatient hospital care, as well as care delivered in emergency departments and outpatient departments. More information about NHCS can be found at: <http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/nhcs.htm>.

## 2. Who is sponsoring the NHCS?

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC) National Center for Health Statistics (NCHS) is sponsoring NHCS. NCHS is the Nation's principal health statistics agency and is responsible for assessing the health status and health care needs of people in the United States. More information about NCHS can be found at: <http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/>.

## 3. What are the benefits of participation?

- **Compensation:** Your facility will be paid \$500 for setting up the procedures to send electronic files to the contractor's secure network connection and for sending a test file. Additionally your facility will receive \$500 for each full year of data submitted every year. That makes two \$500 payments the first year and \$500 every year thereafter. Hospitals which agree to allow NHCS project staff to abstract a sample of visits to ambulatory units will be paid an additional \$500.
- **CEU Credits:** Health Information Management (HIM) professional staff members are eligible for free continuing education credits after completion of an on-line training about participating in NHCS.
- **Data for Comparison:** Selected summaries of your inpatient data will be provided and/or comparative profiles showing statistics for inpatients from similar types of hospitals may be provided.
- **National Statistics:** By participating, your facility provides useful data on hospital care which will inform policies to improve the state of health care in the nation.
- **Improved Patient Care:** Your participation will result in more reliable statistics enabling researchers to better understand health care provided by hospitals.

#### **4. Will patient privacy and confidentiality be maintained?**

Yes. NCHS is required by law to keep all data regarding patients and hospitals confidential and to use these data only for research and statistical purposes, as stated in Section 308(d) of the Public Health Service Act [42 USC 242m(d)] and Section 513 of the Confidential Information Protection and Statistical Efficiency Act (CIPSEA, PL 107-347). All protected health information will be kept confidential and will be used only by NCHS staff, contractors, and agents—only when required and with necessary controls. CIPSEA also includes provisions for a felony conviction and/or a fine of up to \$250,000 if NCHS staff or any NCHS contractor staff violates the confidentiality provisions.

The National Hospital Care Survey has been approved by the NCHS Institutional Review Board (IRB). If you have questions about your rights as a participant in this research study, please call the Research Ethics Review Board at NCHS, toll-free, at 1-800-223-8118. Please leave a brief message with your name and phone number, and say that you are calling about Protocol 2009-21.

#### **5. Does HIPAA permit health care facilities to provide this patient information?**

Yes. NHCS is being conducted under the auspices of CDC/NCHS (federal government). Special provisions within HIPAA permit health care facilities to provide data to public health entities such as CDC/NCHS for purposes such as NHCS.

The HIPAA Privacy Rule recognizes 1) the legitimate need for public health authorities and others responsible for ensuring the public's health and safety to have access to protected health information to conduct their missions, and 2) the importance of public health reporting by covered entities in identifying threats to the public and individuals. The Privacy Rule permits 1) protected health information disclosures without a written patient authorization for specified public health purposes to public health authorities legally authorized to collect and receive the information for such purposes, and 2) disclosures that are required by state and local public health or other laws [HIPAA regulations (45 CFR 164.501)].

Thus, HIPAA permits hospitals such as yours to participate in studies of this nature, such as the NHCS, for public health purposes. Because our contractors are serving as authorized agents of NCHS, it is permissible to disclose data to them for the purposes of this project. HIPAA also permits covered entities to obtain the documentation and rely on the approval of one IRB or privacy board. In this case, the hospital may rely on the approval of the NCHS' IRB.

## 6. Who is conducting NHCS?

NCHS has contracted with Westat for recruitment and data collection activities of NHCS. Westat is an agent of NCHS. More information about Westat can be found at: <http://www.westat.com>.

## 7. What does participation in the NHCS entail?

Participation in NHCS includes the following:

- An eligibility interview to determine your hospital's eligibility and the eligibility of your hospital's emergency department (ED) and/or outpatient departments (OPDs).
- Completion of an annual inpatient hospital questionnaire on hospital characteristics, total admissions, total births and total number of beds.
- An ambulatory hospital interview completed every 15 months, through in-person and telephone interviews with hospital administrators and staff in eligible EDs and OPDs.
- Electronic submission of Uniform Bill (UB)-04 administrative claims data or an electronic file in the same format as the file submitted to the state. Medical record data can also be submitted electronically from Electronic Health Records.
- Abstraction of medical records data from sampled visits to ambulatory units.

Each of these activities will occur on separate time tables. The submission of your electronic data will be continuous while the completion of questionnaires and the abstraction of medical records will be less frequent and in some cases not start for several months following the submission of the data.

You may be asked to participate in special studies on occasion, and you may choose to participate in these studies if you wish.

## 8. How many records from our hospital will we need to transmit to you?

We are asking hospitals to submit electronic data for inpatient and ambulatory visits from your hospital. A sample of visits from your ED and OPDs for a specific reference period will be abstracted from medical records data.

## 9. How much hospital staff time will participation require?

Once your hospital decides to participate in the survey, you will be contacted to arrange the following:

- **Eligibility Interview:** A one-time interview to determine eligibility and obtain general information about your hospital. This may take up to one hour, including answering any questions you may have.
- **Inpatient Hospital Questionnaire:** An annual questionnaire conducted either by telephone or mail, to obtain specific information about hospital characteristics, total admissions, total births and total number of beds. This will take about an hour to complete.
- **Ambulatory Hospital Interview:** Every 15 months, in-person and telephone interviews will be conducted with hospital administrators and staff in eligible EDs and OPDs. These may take approximately two hours to complete.
- **Electronic Data Submission:** The time to set up or complete the submission process will vary by hospital but can take up to four hours.
- **Medical Record Abstraction:** Abstraction of a sample of medical records from the ED and OPD. These data collection activities will be conducted by NCHS and their agents. All protected health information will be kept confidential and will be used only by NCHS staff, contractors, and agents when required and with necessary controls.

Not all of these activities will occur in the same time period. For example, your hospital may be contacted and asked questions concerning eligibility and begin transmitting electronic data and then several months later be contacted again with questions about your ambulatory services and to arrange for the abstraction of medical record data for a sample of ambulatory visits. Throughout the survey NCHS and its agents will remain respectful of your hospital's priorities and work closely with you to arrange for work to be completed on a schedule that best accommodates your hospital.

## 10. How did you select our hospital to participate? Can another hospital participate in our place?

Your health care facility was randomly chosen to provide representative data not only for your hospital, but also for similar hospitals of the same service type, bed size, and geographic location. Selections were made to obtain enough facilities of different sizes, service types, and geographical locations to ensure that the hospitals in our study are nationally representative.

Unfortunately, for statistical reasons, it is not possible to substitute another hospital. If we replaced your hospital with another hospital, this might introduce bias or inaccuracies into the data we collect. This would hinder our ability to make estimates about the amount and types of care provided, as well as the types of patients served, in the entire United States and in hospitals like yours.

## **11. Who else is participating in NHCS?**

The identity of your hospital and other hospitals participating in this study is confidential. Neither NCHS nor its agents may disclose the identity of participants in the NHCS to anyone, including to other participants. No data will be shared among hospitals.

## **12. What will happen with the information we give you?**

All information collected will be the property of NCHS and will be kept strictly confidential. The identity of specific hospitals or individual patients will not be released in any manner except to NCHS staff, contractors, and agents—only when required and with necessary controls. Results of the study will be published only in an aggregated manner that will not allow identification of any individual hospital or patient.

## **13. How long will our hospital be in this study? Will we need to provide information on an ongoing or long-term basis?**

The survey is designed to collect data from your facility on an ongoing basis, until a new sample is inducted. We do not know when a new sample will be drawn, but it will not be for several years.

## **14. Do we need to let our patients know that we are accessing their records for the NHCS?**

HIPAA and the Privacy Rule permit disclosure of protected health information and medical record information without written patient authorization, for specific public health purposes, to public health authorities and their authorized agents, including federal public health agencies such as CDC, of which NCHS is a part. Thus, HIPAA regulations (45 CFR 164.501) do not require you to obtain patient authorization prior to disclosing protected health information to NCHS or to Westat, as an authorized agent of NCHS.

If a patient requests information about disclosures of his or her protected health information, the Privacy Rule requires hospitals to keep accounting documentation for 6 years. NCHS has developed an accounting document for NHCS participating hospitals that facilitates your response to patient requests regarding such disclosures. An accounting document will be provided to your hospital during the survey to simplify your recordkeeping and for your convenience in complying with this requirement. Although NHCS data collection will involve more than 50 records, hospitals are not required to account for the disclosures of information about any particular individual.

## **15. Why are you collecting Social Security numbers?**

The Social Security number is collected to allow linkage with administrative databases such as Medicare and with vital records such as the National Death Index (NDI). For example, we plan to link to NDI, a computerized central file of death record information, to measure post-discharge mortality. NCHS compiles the NDI from data collected by state vital statistics offices. Records are matched using Social Security number and other variables such as name, date of birth, sex, and state of residence. By law, your sharing of this information is voluntary, and whether it is provided or not will have no effect on a patient's benefits. Only NHCS project staff, contractors, and agents working directly on NHCS will have access to this information.

## **16. OK, I'm interested in participating in NHCS. What's the next step?**

Please call Ms. Carolyn Almen, NHCS Recruitment Manager, at our toll-free number, 888-377-7161, extension 4744, to talk about your participation in the National Hospital Care Survey.

You may also contact Dr. Carol DeFrances, Team Leader of the Hospital Care Team, NCHS, at 301-458-4440.

Visit the survey website:  
<http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/nhcs.htm>