NATIONAL CENTER FOR HEALTH STATISTICS
NCHS Fact Sheet | December 2020

National Center for Health Statistics

Overview

The National Center for Health Statistics (NCHS) is the nation's principal health statistics agency, providing data to identify and address health issues. NCHS compiles statistical information to help guide public health and health policy decisions. These health statistics allow NCHS to:

- Document the health status of the U.S. population and selected subgroups
- Document access to and use of the health care system
- Identify disparities in health status and use of health care by race and ethnicity, socioeconomic status, other population characteristics, and geographic region
- Track the impact of major policy initiatives
- Monitor trends in health indicators
- Support biomedical and health services research
- Provide data to support public policies and programs, including recent data on opioid overdose deaths

NCHS, a federal statistical agency

Underlying NCHS' mission and legislative mandate is the principle that the data collected with public funds, or under the umbrella of a public agency, are considered a "public good." The primary considerations for the timely release of NCHS data are:

- Protection of the confidentiality of respondents
- Accessibility of resources required to create public-use files and tabulations
- Data-quality, analytic, or data-processing issues that may limit the ability to make public-use data or tabulations available

In addition to providing data for public use, the agency works to provide objective independent analysis and interpretation of the data it collects through reports and other statistical products.

Health indicators

NCHS produces data on a wide range of health indicators that have important uses for public health, such as:

- Accurate, relevant, and timely data to monitor and respond to the COVID-19 pandemic
- Health insurance coverage and its relationship to access to and the use of health care services
- Prevalence of health conditions, such as obesity and overweight, cholesterol, hypertension, and HIV status among the U.S. population
- Functional status and disability
- Exposure to environmental hazards that shape policy, such as exposure to lead
- Physical activity and nutrition
- Growth charts that are used by health care providers to monitor the development of children
- Care quality and patient safety
- Injuries and their impact on health status and functioning
- Leading causes of death specific to age, race and ethnicity, and sex groups
- Infant mortality, stillbirths, life expectancy, and teen births
- Practice of medicine in the United States and evolution of health information technology
- Changes in the health care delivery system, including emergency department use and capacity; increasing use of prescription drugs; and increasing demand for community-based long-term care

NCHS data sources

Collaborating with other public and private health partners, NCHS uses a variety of data collection mechanisms to obtain accurate information from multiple sources. This process provides a broad perspective to help the organization understand the population's health, influences on health, and health outcomes.

NCHS data sources—Con.

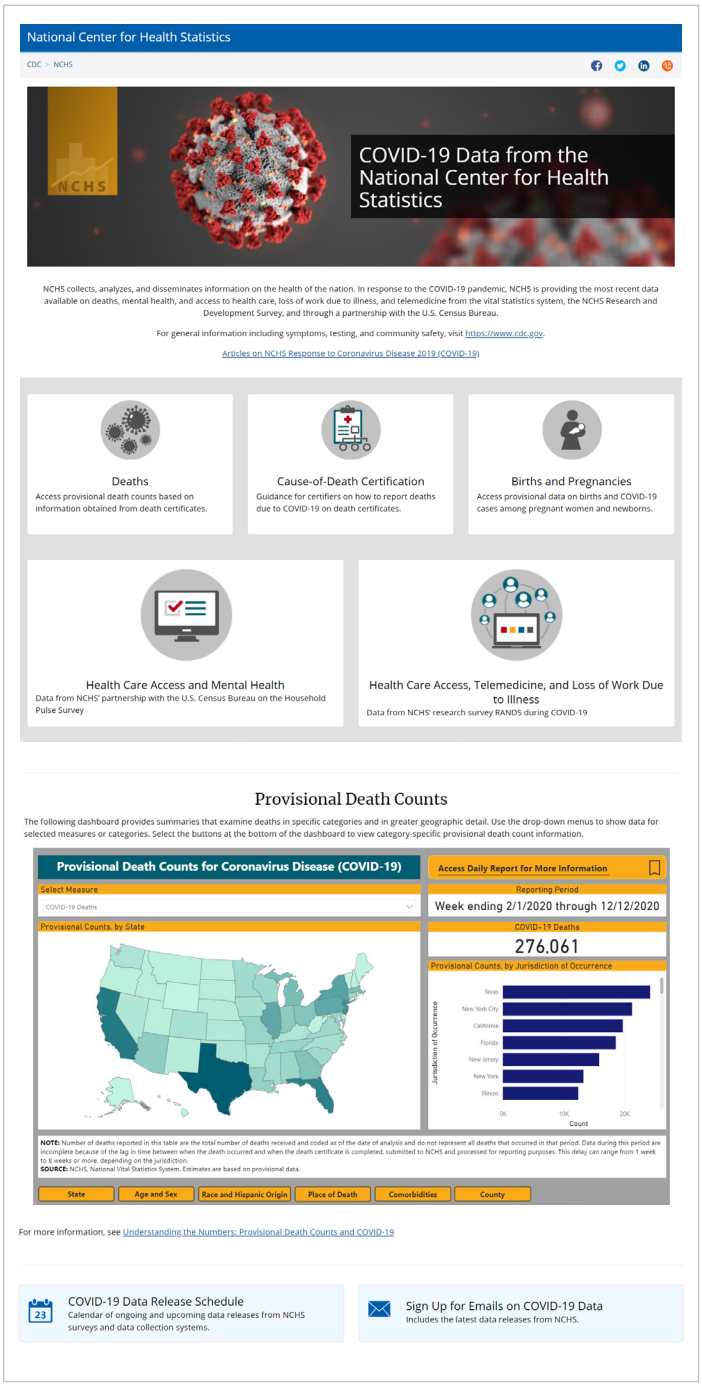
Sources of data collection include:

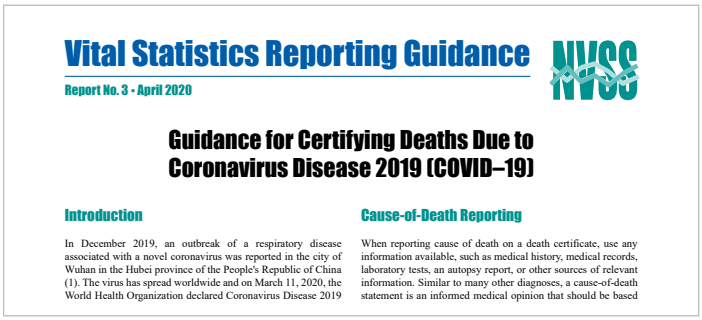
- Birth and death certificates
- Patient medical records
- Personal interviews (in households and by phone)
- Standardized physical examinations and laboratory tests
- Health care facilities administrator and providers interviews

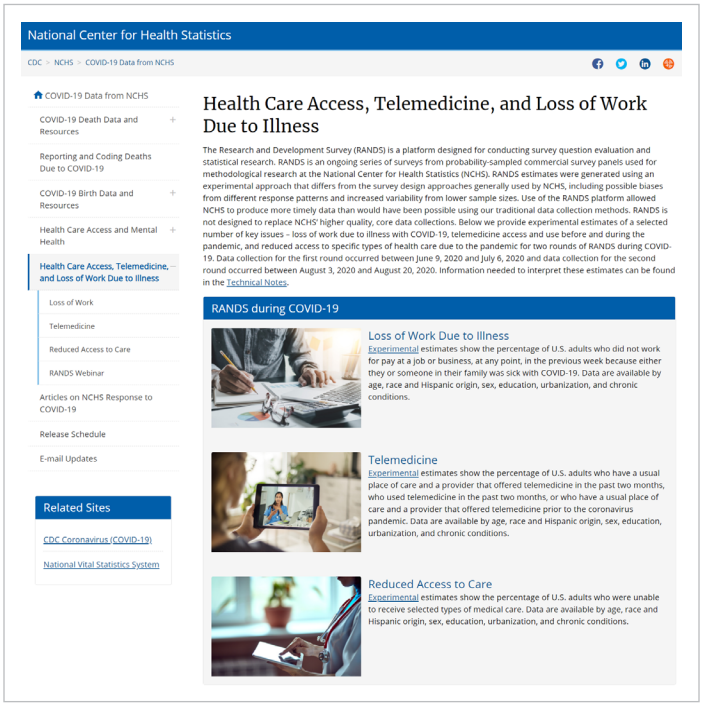
New directions

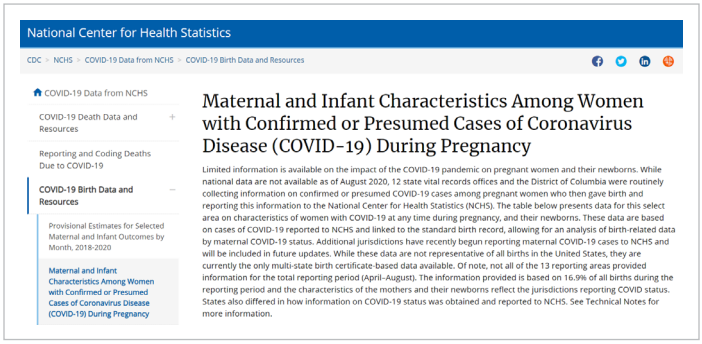
As the nation's principal statistical agency, NCHS continues to improve its ability to strategically collect, use, and share data across government and with the research community, and to provide policy makers with more comprehensive and objective data. NCHS will expand innovative techniques and alternative approaches, ensuring that the agency is well-positioned to meet the need for timely and relevant health data now and in the future.

NCHS products









For more information about NCHS, visit https://www.cdc.gov/nchs.