NCHS Dataline

The National Center for Health Statistics (NCHS) of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention is the U.S. government's vital and health statistics agency. NCHS monitors the health of the nation generally in two ways: by interviewing or examining people and by studying records that contain data collected from vital and medical records. Data are used by policy makers, researchers, and others.

To be more responsive to its constituency, NCHS is expanding or modifying surveys and data collection systems including the National Vital Statistics System (NVSS), the National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey (NHANES), the National Health Interview Survey (NHIS), and the National Health Care Survey (NHCS). Among other features, new electronic products are available and NCHS has added a new report concerning leisure-time physical activity in America.

NEW CONTENT AND OPERATIONS FOR NCHS DATA SYSTEMS

NVSS

The NVSS is gearing up to introduce new standardized certificates of birth and death for state offices reporting vital statistics. Data from the certificates form the basis of national vital statistics. The adapted system will allow for records to be submitted electronically, will generate data on several new topics, and will improve the quality of already existing data.

The revised standard certificates not only include new data items, but also call for procedures to improve data quality. Items on the new standard certificate of birth include information on smoking levels; infectious disease such as gonorrhea, herpes, chlamydia, and hepatitis; WIC participation; fertility therapy results; and height and weight of the mother. New items on the standard certificate of death include whether the decedent in a motor vehicle–related death was the driver or a passenger, tobacco use contributing to the death, and pregnancy status at the time of death. New worksheets, detailed instructions and definitions, and expanded instruction manuals have been developed. The certificates and training materials were field tested and the results were used in redesigning the forms.

NHANES

A major change for NHANES—which collects data through standardized physical examinations, laboratory tests, and health interviews—is a linkage to the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA's) Continuing Survey of Food Intakes by Individuals. Beginning in 2002, collection of dietary data will be an integrated effort of USDA and the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) based on measurement of dietary recall in NHANES. The 24-hour dietary recall in NHANES has been augmented with a second day recall. The collaboration will improve the quality of data and speed the collection and release of data through NHANES's automated systems.

Added to NHANES in 2002 will be testing for human papilloma virus (HPV) in women ages 14–59 using self-administered vaginal swabs, and serologic testing for HPV-16 antibodies in people ages 6–59. The dermatology component of NHANES now includes digital images for hand dermatitis and psoriasis. In addition, the feasibility of self-administered food frequency questionnaires is being tested, as is the use of an activity monitor worn at the waist to estimate daily physical activity.

NHIS

NHIS is a large-scale household interview survey of the civilian, non-institutionalized population. In 1997, NHIS underwent a major redesign, with its questionnaires and content converted for computer-assisted personal interviewing. Now, to take advantage of newer technologies, NHIS is being further adapted to create data products that are easier to access and analyze. The Early Release Program is one example, through which summary statistics are released only on the Internet.

NHIS collects a core set of information, plus each year supplements on specific topics or areas are released. Supplements for 2002 will provide data about complementary and alternative medicine, Healthy People 2010, and children with special needs. Topics expected for 2003 include child mental health, Healthy People 2010, and cancer screening.

NHCS

NHCS is another of the NCHS data systems undergoing an overhaul. In addition to reconfiguring existing surveys using upgraded technology and methodology (including computer-assisted data collection, new ap-

proaches to record linkage, and longitudinal studies), NHCS staff are assessing just what health information is needed to effectively monitor essential aspects of health care. Data that were not all previously available are required to track the public's access to health care, their use of health care, and the quality and cost of health care. The program goal is to cover all setting and facilities where patients receive care, increase the relevance and timeliness of data, and place more emphasis on the changing health care system.

In 2002, three annual surveys covering hospital emergency and outpatient departments will be conducted: the National Hospital Discharge Survey, the National Ambulatory Medical Care Survey, and the National Hospital Ambulatory Medical Care Survey. Two additional surveys, the National Nursing Home Survey and the National Home and Hospice Care Survey, are being redesigned to resume later.

NEW ELECTRONIC DATA RELEASES

Several new data files are available on the NCHS website or on compact disc (CD). They give users access to extensive data from NCHS surveys and data systems.

CDs have been developed from the 2000 National Ambulatory Medical Care Survey and the National Hospital Ambulatory Medical Care Survey containing extensive public-use data about visits to office-based physicians, hospital outpatient departments, and emergency departments. The 2000 National Home and Hospice Survey is also available on CD and contains agency, current patient, and discharged patient files.

NCHS has released a final CD of 1999 and 2000 NHIS survey results and the final versions of the Internet file. Each file contains documentation to help users understand methodology and data analysis. In 2002, NCHS will begin releasing findings electronically from the first two-year NHANES file, covering 1999–2000. Check the NCHS website for more information about NCHS electronic products and data releases.

LEISURE-TIME PHYSICAL ACTIVITY PATTERNS

Nearly 4 in 10 adults in the U.S. do not engage in any leisure-time physical activity, according to a new report based on NHIS data from more than 68,000 household interviews.[1] The report shows that in 1997–1998, only 3 of 10 adults exercised regularly in their leisure time. Preliminary data through the first half of 2001 show that this percentage has not changed significantly over the past four years. The report defines regular physical activity as "light–moderate exercise at least five times per week for a minimum of 30 minutes each time and/or vigorous physical activity at least three times a week for a minimum of 20 minutes each time."

The report also shows that men are more likely than women to engage in leisure-time physical activity and that young adults exercise more regularly than older adults. Seven out of 10 adults ages 18–24 engage in at least some leisure-time physical activity, almost twice the percentage of adults 75 years and older. Approximately two-thirds of white non-Hispanic and Asian/Pacific Islander adults engage in some form of leisure-time physical activity, compared with approximately half of black non-Hispanic adults and Hispanic adults. A quarter of white non-Hispanic adults exercise regularly, more than any other race/ethnic group. The survey identified other factors associated with exercise:

- *Education.* Nearly 8 of 10 adults with graduate level degrees engage in at least some form of leisure-time physical activity—twice as many as those with less than a high school diploma.
- *Income.* Adults with incomes four times the poverty level or higher are significantly more likely to regularly engage in leisure-time physical activity than adults with incomes below the poverty level.
- *Marital status.* Married men and women are more likely than men and women in any other marital status group to engage in some kind of leisure-time physical activity, although never-married adults are more likely than married adults to engage in strengthening activity such as weight-lifting or calisthenics. Widowed adults are less likely to engage in regular leisure-time physical activity than married adults.
- *Region.* Two-thirds of adults living in the Western part of the U.S. engage in some form of leisure-time physical activity, compared with 56% of adults living in the South. Adults who live in the suburbs are more likely to be physically active than adults in urban or rural areas.

The leisure-time activity report and others are available to view or download on the NCHS website.[1]

REFERENCE

1. Schoenborn C, Barnes P. Leisure-time physical activity among U.S. adults, 1997–98. National Center for Health Statistics Advance Data No. 325. April 7, 2002. Available from: URL: http://www.cdc.gov/nchs

NCHS Dataline is prepared by Sandra S. Smith, MPH, Public Affairs Officer, National Center for Health Statistics, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.