

NCHS Dateline

The National Health Interview Survey (NHIS), one of the largest and longest-running nationwide health surveys, is celebrating its 50th anniversary in 2007. The survey—one in a family of health surveys developed and conducted by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC's) National Center for Health Statistics (NCHS) to monitor the nation's health—has been in continuous operation since 1957. NCHS marked the occasion with a one-day conference on June 25 at its headquarters in Hyattsville, Maryland. NCHS publishes a comprehensive assessment of the oral health of Americans, releases the latest birth data, and makes available presentations from its biennial Data Users Conference on the website.

NHIS PRODUCING DATA FOR 50 YEARS

NHIS is a large-scale household interview survey of a sample of the U.S. civilian, noninstitutionalized population. It is charged with tracking a number of measures of the health of Americans, including:

- Health habits, such as physical activity, smoking, and alcohol use;
- Use of preventive health services, i.e., mammograms and pap tests;
- The health status of the population as a whole and in vulnerable groups;
- The impact of income and education on health status; and
- The factors that influence access to health care.

The survey has been in the field continuously since 1957 and has produced the first nationwide data on many health measures and landmark findings on a wide range of health topics, including the most current and comprehensive estimates of health insurance coverage for the U.S. population. Throughout its history, the NHIS has focused on current and contemporary issues in health and health care, such as recent questions on the use of complementary and alternative medicine.

Key findings from the NHIS have shown that:

- In 2005, 21% of U.S. adults smoked, down from about 41% when measured by the survey in 1965.
- Forty-four million Americans—nearly 15% of the population—are without health insurance, according to the latest estimates from January to September 2006.

- Less than one-third of U.S. adults engaged in leisure-time physical activity in 2006.
- More than one-third of Americans use complementary and alternative medical care, according to the 2002 survey. An update is now in the field.

The 50th anniversary conference included sessions on:

- Stories from the field: insiders' tales of what it's like to be an NHIS interviewer;
- Conversations with the NCHS directors, past and present;
- Changes over time in the way NHIS has learned about people's race and ethnicity;
- The use and impact of NHIS findings.

For more information about the NHIS and survey results, go to the NHIS website at <http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/nhis.htm>. The conference presentations are also available.

ORAL HEALTH ASSESSMENT

Americans of all ages continue to experience improvements in their oral health. However, tooth decay in primary teeth increased among children aged 2 to 5 years, according to Trends in Oral Health Status—United States, 1988–1994 and 1999–2004,¹ the most comprehensive assessment of oral health data available for the U.S. population to date.

Tooth decay in primary teeth of children aged 2 to 5 years increased from 24% to 28% between 1988–1994 and 1999–2004. The report also noted significant improvements in several areas. The prevalence of tooth decay in permanent teeth decreased for children, teens, and adults. And more than one-third (38%) of children and teens aged 12 to 19 years had dental sealants, a plastic coating applied to teeth that protects against decay.

The report noted several racial/ethnic disparities. Thirty-one percent of Mexican American children aged 6 to 11 years had experienced decay in their permanent teeth, compared with 19% of non-Hispanic white children. There were also disparities along economic lines. Three times as many children aged 6 to 11 years (12%) from families with incomes below the federal poverty level had untreated tooth decay, compared

with children from families with incomes above the poverty level (4%).

Other findings of the report included:

- The prevalence of tooth decay in the permanent teeth of youths aged 6 to 11 years decreased from approximately 25% to 21%, and among adolescents aged 12 to 19 years decreased from 68% to 59%.
- The use of dental sealants increased from 22% to 30% among youths aged 6 to 11 years, and from 18% to 38% among adolescents aged 12 to 19 years.
- Moderate and severe periodontitis (gum disease) decreased from 10% to 5% among adults aged 20 to 64 years, and from 27% to 17% for seniors aged 65 years and older.
- Among seniors aged 65 years and older, the percentage with complete tooth loss decreased from 34% to 27%.
- Among adults aged 20 to 64 years, 60% reported having a dental visit in the past year during 1999–2004, compared with 66% reporting a visit in the past year during the previous survey, 1988–1994.

Data in the report are from the National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey, a sample survey of the nation's civilian, noninstitutionalized population that includes laboratory testing, interviews, and standardized examinations. The report is on the NCHS website at <http://www.cdc.gov/nchs>.

2005 BIRTH DATA RELEASED

The latest data on births in the U.S. show that teen births continued to decline while births to unmarried women were on the rise. The birth rate for teenagers declined by 2% in 2005, falling to 40.4 births per 1,000 women aged 15–19, the lowest rate ever recorded over the past 65 years since consistent data have been available. Most of the decline was for the 15–17 age group; the rate remained stable for those aged 18–19 years. In contrast, the rate for women aged 30 and older rose to levels not seen in almost 40 years. In the

peak childbearing years, the rate was up for those aged 20–24 and unchanged for those aged 25–29. Overall, the crude birth rate in 2005 was 14.0 births per 1,000 population—unchanged from 2004. The general fertility rate, however, rose to 66.7 births per 1,000 women aged 15–44—the highest level since 1993.

Childbearing by unmarried women increased to record levels for the nation in 2005. The birth rate rose 3% to 47.6 births per 1,000 unmarried women aged 15–44 years. The proportion of all births to unmarried women increased to 36.8%. The report also documented an increase in the cesarean delivery rate, which was up 4% in 2005, to 36.8% of all births—another record high. Both the preterm birth rate (12.7%) and the rate of low birth weight births (8.2%) were up again in 2005. “Births: Preliminary Data for 2005”² presents data on 99.2% of registered vital records occurring in 2005 and reported to NCHS by state vital statistics offices through the National Vital Statistics Reporting System.

NCHS DATA USERS CONFERENCE PRESENTATIONS AVAILABLE

Many of the presentations from the 2006 NCHS Data Users Conference are now on the NCHS website, and others are being added as available. The Data Users Conference featured more than 60 sessions on the methodology, analysis, and use of NCHS datasets. There were introductory and advanced sessions on many of the data systems and sessions dealing with specific health issues, including aging, mental health, and international health.

NCHS Dataline was prepared by Sandra S. Smith, MPH, Communications Consultant at the National Center for Health Statistics, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

REFERENCES

1. Dye BA, Tan S, Smith V, Lewis BG, Barker LK, Thornton-Evans G, et al. Trends in oral health status, United States, 1988–1994 and 1999–2004. *Vital Health Stat* 2007;11:248.
2. Hamilton B, Martin J, Ventura S. Births: preliminary data for 2005. *Natl Vital Stat Rep* 2006 Dec 28;55:1-18.