

NCHS Dataline

The public-use data files and the early release data highlights from the 2008 National Health Interview Survey, conducted by the National Center for Health Statistics (NCHS), Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), are now available. New Web reports present the 2008 data for 15 key health indicators and the latest findings on health insurance coverage in the United States. NCHS has updated the links between two major health surveys and the National Death Index. And a new report looks at the patterns of first marriage in the U.S.

2008 NATIONAL HEALTH INTERVIEW SURVEY

The National Health Interview Survey (NHIS) monitors the nation's health in a large-scale household interview survey, with a nationally representative sample of the U.S. civilian, noninstitutionalized population. The survey reports on a broad range of health topics including health status, health behaviors, and use of and access to health services. The 2008 public-use data files are now available on the NCHS website at www.cdc.gov/nchs/nhis.htm, along with extensive documentation, guides, and instructions for data users.

Selected highlights of the NHIS data are published on a fast track in "Early Release of Selected Estimates Based on Data from the 2008 National Health Interview Survey."¹ In this release, NCHS updates estimates for 15 selected health measures based on data from the 2008 NHIS and presents estimates from 1997 through 2007 for comparison. The 15 early release measures are published prior to final data editing and final weighting, to provide access to the most recent information from the NHIS. The estimates will be updated quarterly as each new NHIS dataset becomes available. For each health measure, a figure shows the trend over time from 1997 through 2008 for the total population, followed by figures and tables showing estimates by age group and gender based on data from the 2008 NHIS. Also, estimates (adjusted by age, gender, or both, where appropriate) are provided for three racial/ethnic groups: Hispanic; non-Hispanic white, single race; and non-Hispanic black, single race. Key findings are highlighted, and data tables are included at the end of each section.

The present report includes 15 measures: lack of health insurance coverage and type of coverage, usual place to go for medical care, obtaining needed medi-

cal care, receipt of influenza vaccination, receipt of pneumococcal vaccination, obesity, leisure-time physical activity, current smoking, alcohol consumption, human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) testing, general health status, personal care needs, serious psychological distress, diagnosed diabetes, and asthma episodes and current asthma.

The highlights for 2008 include the following:

- In 2008, the percentage of the population uninsured at the time of the interview was 14.7%, which was not significantly different from the previous year but down from 15.4% in 1997.
- The percentage of Americans with a usual source of medical care was 86.4% in 2008. Young adults aged 18–24 years were the least likely to have a usual source of care, and women were generally more likely than men to have a source of medical care.
- The percentage of the population that failed to get medical care because of cost has generally increased during the past decade, from 4.2% in 1998 to 6.5% in 2008.
- Approximately 31.0% of adults participated in leisure-time physical activities in 2008, with this percentage decreasing with age.
- One-fifth of U.S. adults were current smokers in 2008, down from about one-quarter of adults in 1997.
- The percentage of adults who had ever been tested for HIV was 38.7% in 2008; the percentage has generally been increasing during the past decade—up from 30.2% in 1997.
- In 2008, 66.0% of people considered themselves to be in excellent or very good health. This figure was about the same as in 2007 but down from 69.0% in 1998. Nearly 24.1% of people rated their health as good, 7.4% as fair, and 2.5% as poor.
- Among adults aged 65 years and older, 6.4% needed help with personal care. The percentage increased with age, with slightly more than 19.0% of those aged 85 years and older needing help with personal care.
- From 1997 to 2008, there was an increasing trend of diagnosed diabetes in the adult U.S. population, from 5.1% in 1997 to 8.2% in 2008.

Two additional reports are published through the early release program. “Wireless Substitution: Early Release of Estimates from the National Health Interview Survey,” which is published in May and December, provides estimates of telephone coverage, including the use of landline and wireless phones. “Health Insurance Coverage: Early Release of Estimates from the National Health Interview Survey, 2008,”² which is published quarterly, provides additional estimates of health insurance coverage. The 2008 report describes the 14.7% of the population (about 43.8 million people) without insurance coverage at the time of the NHIS interview. In addition, the survey obtains information on those who were without insurance for at least part of the year (55.9 million people) and the 31.7 million people who had been uninsured for more than a year.

NCHS UPDATES SURVEY LINKS TO THE NATIONAL DEATH INDEX

The National Death Index (NDI) is a central computerized index of death record information on file in state vital statistics offices. Working with these state offices, NCHS established the NDI as a resource to aid epidemiologists and other health and medical investigators with their mortality ascertainment activities. NCHS has updated the links between the NDI and files from some of its major health surveys, including the National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey (NHANES) and NHIS. NCHS has updated the mortality linkage of the NHIS for the years 1986–2004 to death certificate data found in the NDI. The updated NHIS Linked Mortality Files provide mortality follow-up data from the date of NHIS interview through December 31, 2006.

Mortality ascertainment is based primarily on the results from a probabilistic match between NHIS and NDI death certificate records. Linkage of NHIS survey participants with the NDI provides the opportunity to conduct studies designed to investigate associations of various health factors with mortality, using the richness of the NHIS questionnaires. NCHS recommends that researchers use these new linked mortality files, as they supersede all prior data releases of the NHIS Linked Mortality Files.

There are two versions of the NHIS Linked Mortality Files: (1) public-use files that include a limited set of mortality variables for adult NHIS participants and (2) restricted-use files that include more detailed mortality information and mortality follow-up for children. Each NHIS survey year (1986–2004) is available in a separate data file.

Similarly, NCHS has updated the mortality linkage of NHANES III, which was conducted from 1988 through 1994. NHANES III is a nationally representative survey of the health and nutritional status of the U.S. civilian, noninstitutionalized population. The survey collects data through personal interviews, standardized physical examinations, and laboratory testing. A broad range of health topics is addressed in the survey, but its particular strength is its ability to collect data on previously undiagnosed diseases and conditions. More information on the linked files is available on the NCHS website at www.cdc.gov/nchs.

PATTERNS OF FIRST MARRIAGES

The National Survey of Family Growth (NSFG) collects data on issues related to childbearing, family planning, reproductive health, and family formation and dissolution. NCHS has conducted the NSFG periodically since the 1970s, and the survey recently began continuous operations. A new report, “Who Marries and When? Age at First Marriage in the United States: 2002,”³ analyzes data from the 2002 survey on the incidence and timing of first marriage among women and men aged 15–44 years of age.

Some findings from the report include:

- The majority of men and women will marry at some point; more than 70% of men and women aged 25–44 years have ever been married.
- The likelihood and timing of marriage differed by gender and race/ethnicity. Non-Hispanic black men and women are less likely to have ever been married than non-Hispanic white and Hispanic adults aged 25–44 years.
- Women marry earlier than men.
- The probability that men will marry by age 40 is 81%; for women, 86% will be married by age 40.
- Income levels affect marriage patterns. Being poor is associated with greater proportions of men and women not marrying by age 35, particularly among poor non-Hispanic black men compared with those at higher income levels.

This report can be downloaded from the NCHS website; later data on this topic will be analyzed and published from the ongoing NSFG.

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