



DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH & HUMAN SERVICES

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

HIS-600(L) ATLANTA  
(12-2009)

National Center for Health Statistics  
3311 Toledo Road  
Hyattsville, MD 20782

From the Director of the United States National Center for Health Statistics

I'm Ed Sondik and I head the National Center for Health Statistics (NCHS), part of CDC (the United States Centers for Disease Control and Prevention). In partnership with the U.S. Census Bureau, my agency is conducting a major survey about the nation's health and we need your help.

In the next few days, a Census Bureau interviewer will ask you some questions to see if you are eligible for the National Health Interview Survey. For your protection, the interviewer will show you an official identification card.

Please know that everything you tell us will be kept strictly private. Your answers are used only for health research, and to help understand and solve today's health problems and anticipate future health issues. Quality health information is necessary to make good decisions and sound policies. In this way, taking part in the survey indirectly benefits all Americans.

Strict federal laws protect your information. Question 6 on the back of this letter describes these laws and who may see your personal information. Without your permission, we cannot release information that could identify you or your family.

I hope you will want to take part in the survey—it is your choice. No penalties or loss of benefits will come from refusing.

The survey will take about an hour to do all parts, depending on the size and health of your family. You may choose not to answer any question and, of course, you can stop at any time. Health and health care information from records of other federal agencies may be combined with your survey answers. These data also will be kept strictly private. You also may be given the choice to take part in other surveys sponsored by the National Center for Health Statistics.

Please contact the Census Bureau, toll-free, at 1-800-424-6974 if you have questions about the survey or to schedule an interview. About a week after the interview, some households will be asked a few extra questions for quality purposes.

You can learn more about the survey at our website: [www.cdc.gov/nchs/nhis.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/nhis.htm)

I know your time and privacy are valuable so I am very grateful for your help. Thank you for your cooperation.

Sincerely,

Edward J. Sondik, Ph.D.  
Director, National Center for Health Statistics

REGIONAL OFFICE  
US CENSUS BUREAU  
101 MARIETTA ST NW STE 3200  
ATLANTA GA 30303-2700  
1-800-424-6974

# **FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS ABOUT THE NATIONAL HEALTH INTERVIEW SURVEY (NHIS)**

## **1. HOW WAS I CHOSEN FOR THE SURVEY?**

Every week we pick between 1,000 and 1,400 home addresses across the entire United States. We pick addresses using scientific methods so they represent all communities in the U.S.

## **2. WHY NOT INTERVIEW AT THE HOUSE ACROSS THE STREET? WHY IS MY PARTICIPATION IMPORTANT?**

It is important that the people living at the address selected be in the survey. Due to the scientific methods used to pick addresses, we cannot exchange one address for another. If we did that, the survey results would not describe the entire country.

## **3. I'M NOT SICK—WHY SHOULD I TAKE PART IN A HEALTH SURVEY?**

This is a survey of the Nation's health. We want to know how many people are sick and why they are sick, but it is also important to know how many people are healthy and why they are healthy. Everyone's answers are important.

## **4. WHAT ARE YOU GOING TO ASK ME?**

The NHIS covers a wide range of topics like doctor visits, medical conditions, health insurance, physical activity, and injuries. We also ask questions that help us better understand the health information you give us. For example, we ask about race, income, and permission to combine your answers with information from other places, like medical records. Most people have no difficulty with any of the questions in the NHIS. However, others find some questions to be sensitive. You do not have to answer any questions you don't want to.

## **5. WHY DO YOU ASK ABOUT IMMUNIZATIONS?**

Immunizations help prevent infectious disease, disability, and death. To get the most accurate picture of children's immunization levels, we may ask you for permission to contact your child's immunization providers. This is only for young children and teenagers, and we ask their providers only for immunization dates and doses. Like all the data we collect, this information is treated as confidential.

## **6. WHO WILL SEE MY ANSWERS?**

We take your privacy very seriously. Only those NCHS employees, our specially designated agents including the U.S. Census Bureau, and our full research partners who must use your personal information for a specific reason can see your answers. Everyone else who uses your data can do so only after all information that could identify you and your family is removed. The answers you give us are used for statistical research only. This means that your answers will be combined with those given by other people in a way that protects everyone's identity.

Strict laws prevent us from releasing information that could identify you or your family to anyone else without your consent. Congress authorized the NHIS data collection in Section 306 of the Public Health Service Act (42 United States Code 242k). The federal laws that require all information we collect to be held in strict confidence are Section 308(d) of the Public Health Service Act [42 United States Code 242m (d)] and the Confidential Information Protection and Statistical Efficiency Act (PL 107-347). If any federal employee, contractor, or agent gives out confidential information not authorized by law, he or she can be fired, fined and/or imprisoned.

## **7. WHO LOOKS OUT FOR THE INTERESTS OF SURVEY PARTICIPANTS?**

Every year, the Research Ethics Review Board (ERB) of the National Center for Health Statistics reviews survey content and methods to protect study participants. You may call the ERB if you want to ask about your rights as a participant in this research study. The toll-free number is 1-800-223-8118. Please leave a brief message with your name and phone number. Say you are calling about Protocol # 2009-16. Your call will be returned promptly.

# What Current Surveys Are Being Conducted?

**American Community Survey (ACS)** – The American Community Survey is a key component of the Census Bureau's decennial census program. The ACS eliminates the need for a separate long form in the 2010 Census by providing detailed demographic, social, economic, and housing characteristics for the United States every year instead of every 10 years.

**Consumer Expenditure Survey (CE)** – The Consumer Expenditure Survey program consists of two surveys, the Quarterly Interview Survey and the Diary Survey, that provide information on the buying habits of American consumers, including data on their expenditures, income, and consumer unit (families and single consumers) characteristics. The Census Bureau collects the survey data for the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics.

**Current Population Survey (CPS)** – The Current Population Survey collects up-to-date figures on people who have jobs, those who want jobs and those who are not in the market for jobs. The Census Bureau collects the information and the U.S. Department of Labor publishes the results. The survey results include a number of high-profile economic statistics, including the nation's unemployment rate that you read or hear about monthly in the news.

**National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS)** – The National Crime Victimization Survey obtains accurate and current measures on the amount and kinds of crimes committed in the United States. The survey is used to assess the impact of crime on society, and it is the primary source of information on criminal victimization. The Census Bureau conducts the NCVS for the U.S. Bureau of Justice Statistics, which is part of the U.S. Department of Justice.

**National Health Interview Survey (HIS)** – The National Health Interview Survey obtains information about the health status of children and adults, including health conditions and functional difficulties people might have; health behaviors, such as smoking, drinking and exercise; and access to health insurance and the kinds of health services people might receive.

**Puerto Rico Community Survey (PRCS)** – The Puerto Rico Community Survey is the version of the ACS that is conducted in Puerto Rico.

**Survey of Income and Program Participation (SIPP)** – The Survey of Income and Program Participation collects information on income received from a variety of sources, on general demographic characteristics, and on other data related to government program participation and eligibility.



## Other safeguards for your privacy

- Any item that could indirectly reveal who you are is removed. More than names and addresses are taken off everything we give out. No details on jobs, family, births, or residence that, if pieced together, could lead to identification are ever released.
- NCHS withholds even statistical totals if they represent a location so small that the numbers might identify someone.
- Special security measures block outside contact with any confidential information stored in NCHS computers.
- We also use coded passwords (changed frequently) to prevent unauthorized entry into the computers.
- No authority can obtain identifiable data from NCHS without permission that can be granted only by you. This means we deny access to your records to the police and military and any branch of the Federal government - including the Internal Revenue Service, Immigration, and welfare agencies - *for whatever reason*. Your answers are also protected from the Freedom of Information Act as well as court subpoenas. NCHS's legal ability to protect your information has been upheld at the highest levels of federal courts.

## For Further Information

NCHS data are released in printed reports, CD-ROM's, and diskettes, and through the NCHS home page on the World Wide Web.

For further information and to access NCHS products, visit the NCHS home page:

[www.cdc.gov/nchs](http://www.cdc.gov/nchs)

or contact:

**Data Information Line  
National Center for Health Statistics  
Centers for Disease Control and  
Prevention**

**3311 Toledo Road, Room 5420  
Hyattsville, MD 20782  
1-800-232-4636**

For specific questions about how NCHS protects the information you provide, contact:

**Alvan O. Zarate, Ph.D.  
Confidentiality Officer, NCHS  
3311 Toledo Road, Room 7116  
Hyattsville, MD 20782**

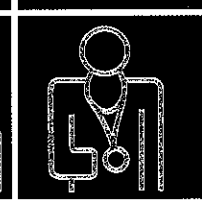
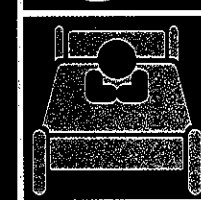
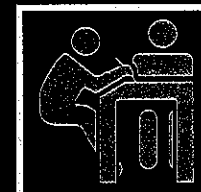
**Telephone: (301) 458-4601  
E-mail: [aоз1@cdc.gov](mailto:aоз1@cdc.gov)**

SAFER • HEALTHIER • PEOPLE™



# How the National Health Interview Survey Keeps Your Information

## Strictly Confidential



U.S. DEPARTMENT OF  
HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES  
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention  
National Center for Health Statistics

# Protecting the public's privacy...no idle pledge

There's safety in numbers, especially our numbers!

## **The law...**

Information collected in the National Health Interview Survey (NHIS) is used only for statistical purposes. Furthermore, except for those parties we described in the letter mailed to you earlier, no information that could identify you can be released to anyone - including the President, Congress or any court.

## **The affidavit...**

Everyone working on or conducting the NHIS **must** sign an affidavit - a legal document making them subject to the Privacy Act, the Public Health Service Act, and other laws.

## **The penalties...**

Violators can be fined up to \$250,000, lose their job, or go to jail.

## **The record...**

Since its very first survey in 1957, the National Center for Health Statistics (NCHS) has maintained a perfect record in protecting the privacy of individuals, businesses, and families participating in the NHIS.

## A message from the Director of NCHS

This agency is well known for the quality of information it provides to the public, to researchers, and to the Government. That would be impossible if you who provide us with this information could not be given a guarantee of confidentiality, and be assured that we can back it up.

These principles are firmly grounded in Federal laws including the Privacy Act, the Public Health Service Act, and Title 18 of the United States Code. All NCHS employees must sign a pledge making them legally liable and subject to all punishments in these laws.

Those working for NCHS must also strictly observe special practices for the careful treatment of confidential information. These practices are meant to ensure that the privacy of our respondents is fully respected.

We have, therefore, a number of very important reasons for observing strict confidentiality: it is the right thing to do, we could not collect quality information without doing so, and it is required by law.

## The Census Bureau and NCHS: a long and effective relationship

The U.S. Census Bureau first carried out the National Health Interview Survey for NCHS in 1957. Today, more than 40 years later, the record of honoring the promise to protect the privacy of each individual respondent remains unblemished.

We believe this record is an important reason why so many persons contacted in this survey readily participate and provide reliable information. As a result, ample representative and accurate information is made available every year to the American public, the U.S. Government, and the research community.

*Edward J. Sondik*