

Vital Statistics Program

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State Website: [The Office of Vital Statistics](#)

National Website: <http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/nvss.htm>

What is it?

The Office of Vital Statistics (OVS) administers the vital statistics program, which collects vital records for registration. The system of vital statistics preserves and protects the collection of all vital events. These vital records are the major life events for individuals and include births, fetal deaths (stillbirths), deaths, marriages, divorces (dissolution of marriages) and abortions. The Vital Statistics Program maintains and operates as the Commonwealth's only official vital statistics system. OVS performs four distinct core functions: vital records, public requests, protection, and collaboration.

Why is it used?

- Essential for identifying and measuring health patterns and for assessment of public health achievements.
- Supports nationwide statistics by integrating into the National Vital Statistics System (NVSS) through NCHS at CDC.
- Contributes to the assessment of the prevalence and distribution of many diseases and conditions.
- Identifies populations at risk for certain medical problems and diseases.
- Aids in the evaluation of the effectiveness of public health programs statewide.
- Supports the study of maternal and child health and infant morbidity and mortality, e.g., crude birth rates by geographic region, percent of births by age of mother, age specific birth rates, live births by birth weight, preterm births rates and fertility rates, among others.
- Helps to identify morbidity and mortality trends within communities.



- Calculates the estimate of death indicators such as crude death rate by geographic region, age and cause-specific death rates.
- Source of information for percent of underage marriage, marriage rates, and divorce rate estimates.
- Supports planning and allocation of resources by government agencies.
- Tracks the occurrence and characteristics of vital events in the state.

What data is collected?

Vital records resulting from vital registrations that take place in Kentucky are gathered by OVS, which also receives data about out-of-state occurrences for Kentucky residents. The completed paper or electronic forms that record significant events make up the collection of these vital records. Standard certificates are used to gather essential data prepared in a way that complies with NCHS standards. This data includes:

- Demographic information on the individuals associated with the vital event.
- Characteristics of the vital event.
- Some information on behavioral risk factors.
- Please see table in Appendix D for more information.

How is data collected?

- OVS is centrally located and is responsible for civil registration and certification of all vital record occurrences in the Commonwealth.
- Events that take place out-of-state for Kentucky residents are gathered with the collaboration of 57 other nationwide state jurisdictions.
- Information originates from birth, death, stillbirth, marriage, divorce and abortion certificates and forms collected and maintained by OVS.
- Please see Appendix D for more detail.

Data Strengths:

- OVS is the only agency that collects vital events data and holds over 15 million unique records.
- Registration of vital events is required by law, assuring that virtually 100% of events that occur in the state are reported.
- Vital statistics data have been maintained in reasonably consistent formats since 1990.
- Population-based rather than relying on a sampling strategy.
- Electronic collection protocols and formats are similar among states.
 - Data collected over time is for the most part comparable within the state as well as across the country.
- Since OVS data is integrated to the NVSS through NCHS/CDC, it is used to estimate the vital statistics for Kentucky at the national level and to compare nationwide, therefore OVS data is used for national statistics for Kentucky. National web source: [CDC WONDER](https://wonder.cdc.gov/).

Data Limitations:

- Each state registers vital events that occur within its jurisdiction, therefore, data on out of state events may be limited due to how other states collect vital event information and what data is shared with the Kentucky OVS.
- Data on marriages and divorces are often incomplete because the collection method relies on mailed forms from county clerk offices.



- Due to the time it takes to collect and complete records, available data is typically 8-10 months behind the current year.

How is this system evaluated?

- Data are subject to computerized edit checks when entered.
- Corrections and amendments are made to the database on an on-going basis.
- The NCHS requires the state to maintain an error rate of no more than 2% for birth and death data.
- OVS conducts a final check of the files prior to establishing the official annual database.
- Any anomalies are checked against the actual certificates.

Data Set Availability:

- You can request data by completing this request form: <https://wkf.ms/3Qyj8VY>
- Data is released in an Excel workbook, Excel-csv, or text file. The most common ways to distribute data are via email, encrypted files via email, or transfer files through the state secure site MOVEitFTP.
- For requesters inside the cabinet, data transferring to network-attached storage in One Drive folders is another common method. Sometimes external drives may be used when multiples files for indexes/lists are provided.
- Depending on the complexity of the data request and the time it takes to process the request, there may be a fee. See Appendix D for more information.
- Data is released in the following formats:
 - Aggregate data reports.
 - Individual level data.
 - Data elements for births and deaths available as open records in an index or a list. Please see Appendix D for more information.
 - Individual level data that is not open as a public record is released through a data sharing agreement. IRB approval may be needed if PII or Protected Health Information (PHI) are included.

Data Release Policy:

- OVS adheres to the KDPH Data Release Policy, but it applies additional and specific restrictions due to internal regulations and policy within the OVS.
- There are two types of criteria: strict and minimum.
 - Program-specific regulations enforce stringent standards contingent on the degree of data sensitivity but both criteria are recommended for any particular use or situation.
- All data will be released if the population group under study is ≥ 1000 . If the population count is < 1000 , then any cell < 5 will be suppressed.
 - OVS will suppress cells with fewer than five cases if the population count is less than 1000 and the comment < 5 shall be inserted.
- A combination of aggregate years of data (3-5 years) can be released for highly stratified data, to accommodate for low cell counts for specific cause or variable(s).
- Most data requests are released upon discretion of the epidemiologist in OVS however, depending on the case or type of data or request, state registrar and/or Office of Legal Services may provide the final approval for data release.



- Individual level data that includes PII and/or PHI would have to follow the requirements for a data sharing agreement, and IRB approval (as needed) would have to be obtained before data is released. Assistance will be provided to requestors if IRB approval is needed.
- It is prohibited by law for anyone to permit the inspection of vital records, to disclose information contained in them, or to copy or issue a copy of any record, unless specifically authorized by KRS 213, by regulation, or an order of a court with competent jurisdiction. This is to ensure the integrity of vital records, their proper use, and the effective and proper administration of the system of vital statistics. Adopted regulations by the cabinet must guarantee sufficient levels of vital record security and confidentiality.

Data Publications:

- Kentucky Annual Vital Statistics Reports from 1997 - 2005 are available on the KDPH website: <https://chfs.ky.gov/agencies/dph/dehp/vsb/Pages/reports.aspx>.
- This manuscript is no longer published, but tables can be requested for release if the data requested meets the data release policy.

Suggested Citation:

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