



CDC's ABORTION SURVEILLANCE SYSTEM

Recorded November 21, 2006

This podcast is presented by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. CDC – safer, healthier people.

This podcast was produced to provide answers to questions that are frequently asked regarding CDC's Abortion Surveillance System. It was prepared to accompany the release of the latest report, *Abortion Surveillance, United States, 2003*, which can be found at: www.cdc.gov/mmwr.

CDC began reporting abortion surveillance in 1969. This year's report, like others, summarizes the number and characteristics of women obtaining legal induced abortion. The report is intended primarily for use by public health officials, but may also be of interest to others with responsibilities for planning or evaluating public health activities.

Here are some important points about CDC's abortion surveillance system and the report based upon data from that system.

State and local health departments provide summary data on a voluntary basis to CDC. This year's report includes 49 reporting areas that include New York City and the District of Columbia. The states of California, New Hampshire and West Virginia did not provide reports, nor did U.S. territories.

We understand the report is used by many in the field of public health. Some have mentioned they use the report:

- to identify characteristics of women who are at high risk of unintended pregnancy;
- to monitor trends in the number, ratio, and rate of abortions by state or region of the country; and
- to compare trends in this nation with those of other countries.

For example, demographers use information in the report to calculate pregnancy rates, which are combined estimates of births and fetal loss.

Managers of public health programs use this data to evaluate the effectiveness of programs to prevent unintended pregnancy. There have historically been other uses of the data, such as in the calculation of the mortality rate of specific abortion procedures.

In order to obtain data for this surveillance system, we assure states and localities that we will maintain strict confidentiality of data provided to CDC. Therefore, no public use dataset is available.

CDC receives many calls from demographers, clinicians, and other public health professionals about this system and data in the reports. In some cases, we will guide the caller to the appropriate table or narrative. If we do not have the information, we

refer callers to *PubMed*, a scientific database supported by the National Library of Medicine. This database often helps our callers find the information they desire. You can search these databases by going to the National Library of Medicine's website at www.nlm.nih.gov

Some callers request information about factors related to abortion trends. CDC only collects aggregated data and prepares it so that others can make comparisons. We can report basic trends but do not have the data to support other analyses.

Now a mention about the reporting format. The format was adopted in the early years of the Surveillance Report. It provides the core or common elements available from most state or local forms and reports. For example, column headings for tables have been the same for many years, allowing readers to make comparisons over time.

CDC added one new facet to the report. Some states now report the use of medical abortion. These are abortion procedures using medications instead of surgery. Therefore, we adapted our system to include a separate category for medical abortions. The number of states and localities reporting this information has been increasing each year. As we receive reliable aggregate data on medical abortion, we provide it in the annual Surveillance Report.

We are also using this podcast to help health care providers and others know more about abortion reporting. CDC does not require reporting of these procedures. However, each state and some localities have their own requirements. The most recent CDC guidance and recommendations are contained in the document: *State Definitions and Reporting Requirements for Live Births, Fetal Deaths and the Induced Termination of Pregnancy*. This document, prepared by CDC's National Center for Health Statistics, was updated in 1997 to reflect the needs of vital statisticians and others in state and local health departments.

As you review this year's report, we remind you that public health data systems are based on many different people and agencies reporting an event. We urge you to read the entire narrative of the report and pay special attention to the annotations that accompany the tables in the document. For more information on this and other reports, go to www.cdc.gov/mmwr.

Thank you for taking the time to understand the basics about CDC's Abortion Surveillance System.

To access the most accurate and relevant health information that affects you, your family, and your community, please visit www.cdc.gov.