Disclosure control guidance for the Compendium of population health indicators

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Disclosure control

1.1. Births and deaths registration data

Guidance from the Office for National Statistics (ONS) on disclosure control for birth and death statistics was updated in 2014. Following the update, tables based on death registrations data presenting figures by year, sex, quinary age group, International Classification of Diseases (ICD) code and any sub-national geography no longer require disclosure control to be applied if the underlying resident population size is estimated as being greater than 5,000. This replaces the previous guidance that any births and deaths figures based on a count of two or less (including zero) must be suppressed.

In addition, ONS recommend that as the Isles of Scilly unitary authority (UA) has a resident population size less than 5,000 this UA should be either; combined with Cornwall UA, have any small numbers suppressed, or a full risk assessment should be carried out demonstrating the risk of disclosure is small.

Following these recommendations, NHS Digital has chosen to combine Isles of Scilly UA with that of Cornwall UA, resulting in no geographical areas having a resident population size less than 5,000 and therefore mostly removing the requirement for suppressed counts.

However, a further update was added to the ONS guidance in 2016, which recommends that small numbers should be suppressed in very sparse tables presented at geographies below region where there is a chance information could be disclosed about an individual. In light of this guidance, there may be a need to suppress counts of two or less in some cases. Where this is the case, the value will be suppressed and replaced with an ‘X’ along with any rates and confidence intervals.

Further guidance can be found on the ONS website: https://www.ons.gov.uk/methodology/methodologytopicsandstatisticalconcepts/disclosurecontrol/guidanceforbirthanddeathsstatistics

For guidance on the use of HES-ONS linked mortality data see section 1.2, ‘Hospital Episode Statistics (HES)’ below.

1.2. Hospital Episode Statistics Admitted Patient Care data (HES APC)

Where a numerator has a value between one and five (inclusive), the value is suppressed and replaced with an ‘X’ along with any rates and confidence intervals.

Further guidance can be found in section 6.1 of the HES Analysis Guide: www.digital.nhs.uk/hes.

1.3. HES APC data (HES APC) and the Office for National Statistics (ONS) linked mortality data set (HES-ONS)

The disclosure control for HES-ONS linked mortality data follows both HES disclosure control guidance and ONS guidance on disclosure control of death statistics.
Following the ONS guidance would require suppression of organisations with fewer than 5,000 residents. As the only UA which has a population of fewer than 5,000 is the Isles of Scilly, the numerator and denominator data for Isles of Scilly has been combined with that of Cornwall UA for indicators that use HES-ONS data.

As a result, residence level data follows the HES disclosure rules only.

For non-residence level data (such as hospital provider), both the HES and the ONS disclosure rules apply.

1.4. Other health statistics

For suppression guidance for indicators that use different data sources to those above, please refer to the individual indicator specification documents.

Freedom of Information Act 2000 (FOI)

It should be noted that confidentiality and disclosure rules still apply under the Freedom of Information Act 2000. For further information on the FOI Act please see www.digital.nhs.uk/foi.

Contacts

• ONS births and deaths data

If you need further advice on the release of ONS data, please contact the Vital Statistics Outputs Branch via e-mail at vsob@ons.gov.uk.

• General Enquiries

For general enquiries on the Compendium of population health indicators, advice on information from Hospital Episode Statistics (HES) data or data from other sources, please contact NHS Digital (Tel 0300 303 5678, or e-mail enquiries@nhsdigital.nhs.uk quoting ‘Compendium’ in the subject line).

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