

January, 2015

NJSHAD Provides Detailed Birth and Death Datasets for Community Planning while Improving Timeliness

What was the problem/situation?

Prior to the establishment of the data system known as the [New Jersey State Health Assessment Data System II \(NJSHAD\)](#), the New Jersey Department of Health's Center for Health Statistics (CHS) spent considerable time and expense publishing annual reports of New Jersey birth and death statistics. The reports were voluminous, with many detailed tables. Printing and mailing of the reports were expensive, and the reports were out of date as soon as another year of vital records data became available. Additionally, requests from school districts, local politicians, and others required that the vital records datasets be filtered by custom geographies and with custom cross-tabulations that were not available in published reports. Handling the numerous requests which arrived by phone, e-mail, and fax took 1-2 hours of CHS employee Darrin Goldman's time each day. Complex requests often required multiple contacts with the requestors in order to fully understand what was being requested, and responses might not be completed for up to several weeks.

For example, each year, consultants representing New Jersey's 590 school districts would contact CHS and request custom data reports of birth counts by municipality by year so that their school district could plan for the number of students expected to enroll in New Jersey's 2,000 elementary schools in future years. These requests were complicated by the fact that some New Jersey school districts are combinations of several municipalities. "They needed to figure out how many kindergarteners would be entering their schools five years in the future," said Darrin Goldman. Other custom vital records requests were prepared for community activists, community associations, municipal and county health departments, local politicians, researchers, students, and charitable organizations.



What action was taken to resolve the problem?

By providing online data and information and reducing the high call volume of custom data extraction requests to department staff, [NJSHAD query tools](#) have proven to be effective for quickly answering questions from school district planners and others. The [NJSHAD birth query tool](#) is recognized by school districts as being timely, dynamic, and efficient. Since the query tool is easy-to-use, even individuals with limited familiarity with data utilization can customize a query, and conduct data discovery on specific issues that matter in their community.

Since NJSHAD is updated year round by CHS and other partners throughout the New Jersey Department of Health as soon as new data becomes available, datasets are provided to users sooner. Examples of current vital records uses of NJSHAD:

- School planners use the NJSHAD birth query tool to obtain unsuppressed counts and rates of resident births for each of New Jersey's 565 municipalities.
- Maternal and child health consortium use the NJSHAD birth query tool to obtain county counts and rates of births by race or ethnicity. Counts of births can be filtered and compared by numerous maternal characteristics (mother's age; race and/or ethnicity; marital status; parity; tobacco, alcohol and drug use during pregnancy; Medicaid status), infant status (sex; plurality; birth weight; gestational age; large or small for gestational age; and Apgar score), health service utilization characteristics (prenatal care onset; number of prenatal visits; method of delivery; place of birth; type of birth attendant; and feeding type at hospital discharge), and mother's geographical residence (county or municipality of residence).
- Hospitals and local health organizations use the [NJSHAD Community Health Assessment](#) resource page which provides hyperlinks to public health data on births, deaths, inpatient hospital discharges; census data; health insurance coverage; and morbidity for asthma, cancer, cardiovascular disease, diabetes, obesity, and substance abuse.
- Students use NJSHAD to obtain information on the "top 10" most frequent causes of death.



As stated by Darrin Goldman, "Most people find what they need on SHAD. Way fewer people call now. If they e-mail me, I can usually send them a link to the info they want in SHAD. Now I have more time to prepare IRB-approved requests and to provide provisional birth data. NJSHAD query tools save money and improve the timeliness of vital records datasets provided to users by the New Jersey Department of Health."

NJSHAD serves as the main data portal for NJDOH and provides public access to data and information from the entire New Jersey Department of Health. NJSHAD provides static public health indicators which combine data and information, and dynamic custom public health query tools. The functionality, content, and utility of NJSHAD are constantly being enhanced.