

COMPARABILITY RATIOS

The National Center for Health Statistics (NCHS) preliminary comparability ratios are developed for use with the national data. These ratios are applied to age-adjusted rates for selected causes of death when comparing death data from 1994-1998 to rates from 1999. The method is not recommended for comparing trends prior to 1994. At this time, there is no general consensus about whether or not to use this method among state and local health departments. The Vital Statistics Section of the California Department of Health Statistics indicated that California is not planning to use or report comparability modified rates for trend data until at least several years of data is available. For consistency with statewide recommendations, San Diego County is not planning to prepare comparability modified rates until at least state-specific comparability ratios become available and there is a larger general consensus within California that these rates would be appropriate to use.

Several websites from the National Center for Health Statistics provided additional information about ICD-9 and ICD-10 comparability issues and ratios. For more information on comparability issues and ratios, refer to

<http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/about/major/dvs/icd10des.htm> and
http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/nvsr/nvsr49/nvsr49_02.pdf.

CRUDE RATES and AGE-ADJUSTED RATES

Age adjustment (using the direct method) is the application of observed age-specific rates to a standard age distribution to eliminate differences in crude rates in populations of interest that result from differences in the population's age distributions. The use of an agreed upon standard population permits comparison with state, national, and *Healthy People 2010* objectives. The new standard is based upon 2000 population and replaces the 1940 standard population, which has been used for over 50 years. Changing to the new 2000 standard population will affect the magnitude of age-adjusted death rates due to the different age distribution structures of the two different standard populations. In general, the 2000 population is considered an "older" population compared to the 1940 "younger" population. Comparisons of age-adjusted rates based upon two different standard populations can result in erroneous conclusions.

Birth cohort infant death rates are not age-adjusted. Since the deaths are linked to the State's birth data on a record-by-record basis, these rates are based on a numerator (deaths) and a denominator (births) from the same record. Age adjusting is not applicable to these data.

For further information about age adjustment using the 2000 population, please refer to <http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/datawh/nchsdefs/ageadjustment.htm>.