

Appendix 5B: Criteria for Evaluating a Data or Information Source

This appendix addresses the rationale for evaluating a data source, guidance on the minimum areas that should be included in an assessment, and a template that can be adjusted to fit birth defects surveillance program objectives.

Information from different data sources may serve different purposes for a birth defects surveillance program. The data source's strengths as well as its operational biases and procedures influence the case definition criteria, accuracy, completeness, and timeliness of the data. The way a data source identifies cases is a potential cause of over- or under-reporting.

A birth defects surveillance program evaluates a data or information source to assess its purpose, traits, characteristics, organizational structure, scope, and biases. Evaluation also enables birth defects surveillance programs to determine the potential added value the information from a data source can provide, especially when program resources are limited. It is helpful to develop a file on each data source containing the information outlined below.

5B.1 Minimum Process a Birth Defects Surveillance Program Should Engage in for Each Reporting Data Source

1. Know the data source's **mission or goals**.
2. Identify **professional or legal mandates** governing operations of the data source that may affect data access or data quality from that source.
3. Describe the **population** served by the data source.
4. Chart the **flow of information** that is relevant to the birth defects surveillance program through the data source. This is a good way to determine how the information is collected originally, and whether the information is forwarded to a central repository (e.g., centralized computer file, medical records department, administrative database).
5. **Evaluate the quality of data as reported** from the reporting source, as a benchmark for future evaluations. Assess the quality of the reported diagnosis code(s) received from the data source. Evaluate the operating environment in which the health information classification system is applied and the diagnosis codes are assigned.
 - For what purpose is the health information collected? For what purpose is the code assigned? (e.g., billing, surveillance, etc.)
 - Who assigns the code? With what training and oversight?
 - How is the code determined? Is computer-assisted coding utilized (e.g., natural language processing)?

6. Maintain an up-to-date **directory of names and contact information** for key personnel at the data source (e.g., medical records personnel).
7. Provide a summary of the data source's **strengths, weaknesses, and strategic importance** to the birth defects surveillance program.
8. Establish the **method of reporting or accessing information**, which may pertain to who within the birth defects surveillance program staff communicates with the personnel at the data or information source, and who receives or accesses the data.
9. Establish the **schedule of reporting or accessing information** so that the birth defects surveillance program has a way to monitor frequency, consistency in reporting and accessing information, and potentially monitor disruptions in data reporting or data access.
10. **Track changes and updates** to the interactions between the birth defects surveillance program and the data source. This could be an ongoing log, and may include changes to reporting formats, schedules, methods, etc.
11. **Other areas of importance to the birth defects surveillance program** can also be included in the evaluation process for each data source.

5B.2 Data Source Descriptive Assessment Tool

Title of Data Source: _____

Criteria or Trait Evaluated	Explanation and Description of Criteria	Specifics for This Data Source
Source or Site	<i>The source or site is briefly defined</i>	
Legal or Professional Mandates	<i>Legal issues or professional requirements that govern or guide operations are described</i>	
	Statutes or regulations	
	Accreditation agencies (e.g., JCAHO)	
	State licensing boards	
	Federal agency requirements (e.g., medical participation agreements)	
Mission or Objective	<i>Purpose or reason that the source or site collects the information</i>	
	How is the information used?	
Scope or Breadth	<i>Time span or scope of time for the information collected</i>	
	What time span does the source or site address? Single time point, or follow-up capability?	
Operational Structure	<i>Flow of information is described</i>	
	Where is the information collected?	
	Who collects the information?	
	When is the information documented?	
	How is the information documented?	
	How is the information stored?	

Evaluation Criteria Trait	Explanation and Description of Criteria	Specifics for This Data Source
Type of Information Collected	<i>Type of information collection is listed</i>	
	Unique pieces of information that the source or site collects are listed	
Accessibility and Retrievability	<i>Location of the information</i>	
	Process to access the information	
	Process to retrieve the information	
	Database, records merging, and capability for other electronic applications	
Strengths as a Data Source/Site	<i>The strengths and attributes of this source/site are described</i>	
	Accuracy of the information	
	Completeness of the information	
	Timeliness of the information	
	Effort and resources required for case finding or for receiving a case report	
	Other qualities detailed	
Weaknesses as a Data Source/ Site	<i>The weaknesses and deficiencies of the source/site are described</i>	
	Accuracy of the information	
	Completeness of the information	
	Timeliness or time lags in case reporting	
	Effort and resources required for case finding or for receiving a case report	
	Other qualities detailed	
Liaisons and Partnerships	<i>Key contact people/departments are identified</i>	
	Ways to enhance cooperation and partnerships	
Additional Comments	<i>Issues to consider</i>	
References	<i>Information for references regarding characteristics of the data source</i>	
	States experienced with this data source	
	Literature references	