

Justification - The National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey (NHANES) Pilot Studies

The National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey (NHANES) contributes to the mission of CDC, by collecting objective data that are used to promote health, by preventing and controlling disease and disability. CDC works with partners throughout the nation and the world to monitor public health, formulate and implement prevention strategies, develop health policies, promote healthy behaviors, and foster safe and healthful environments. In addition to the groups within the CDC, NCHS collaborates with over two dozen federal agencies to plan and fund the NHANES. The survey partners include numerous institutes of the National Institutes of Health, several programs within the U.S. Department of Agriculture, the Food and Drug Administration, and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. NHANES data are used to assess environmental exposures; evaluate nutrition program and policy impacts; and estimate prevalences of health risk factors, chronic conditions, and infectious diseases.

NHANES is a continuous survey, meaning survey data is collected every year. A major advantage of continuous NHANES data collection is the ability to address emerging public health issues and provide objective data on more health conditions and issues. Because of the NHANES sample design, data is released in two year cycles. Some of the survey information gathered may change at the beginning of each two year cycle. In some cases, this means new content will be added. In other cases, this means that existing content may be modified.

New content and changes to existing content must be tested, before they become part of the regular survey. There are many reasons for this. For example, testing allow us to assess the feasibility of new or changed content. It allows us to find out how long the component being tested will take or how well received the component will be among our participants. The results of such testing also allow the NHANES program to make changes or adjustments to improve the component. It also provides hands on training opportunities for NHANES survey staff responsible for collecting the data. Testing is a vital step in making sure NHANES is effective and efficient in its use of resources. Such measures promote improved data quality once the data is collected in the actual survey. Since data collection is continuous, pilot tests of new or revised survey material must be conducted during ongoing NHANES data collection.