

V. POPULATION DATA AND VITAL STATISTICS RATES

Every 10 years (years ending in zero) the U.S. Bureau of the Census counts the United States population, which includes a profile of the population's characteristics such as age, race, and sex. After a census year, estimates of population size and composition are based on knowledge of the population in the census year plus subsequent events such as births, deaths, and migration.

In the latter years of a decade, estimates may depart considerably from "true" population values to the extent that assumptions, particularly about in- and out- migration, depart from what has actually occurred. Thus, vital statistics rates that are based on population counts in the denominator may be subject to some degree of error.

In this report on 2000 North Carolina vital statistics, we have used population estimates based on the 2000 census for the denominators of the 2000 rates. For the denominators of the 1996-2000 rates, we have used "smoothed" population files where information from both the 1990 and 2000 censuses was used to adjust the previous 1996-1999 population estimates. For the state as a whole, the 2000 census data revealed that previous estimates for the late 1990s were approximately five percent too low. This error will vary by county. The general result is that use of the updated population estimates will produce rates that are slightly lower than those shown in previous editions of this publication.

