

STD*MIS 4.0 Frequently Asked Questions

1. What does it mean when you say STD*MIS 4.0 is now a Windows-based application? My current version of STD*MIS is already running under Windows.

Current versions of STD*MIS actually run under DOS, which itself is running under Windows. STD*MIS now communicates directly with Windows and eliminates the additional DOS layer. This will increase the speed and reliability of the application and also eliminate the need to configure the DOS environment to run the application. STD*MIS now functions more seamlessly within the Windows environment, which makes IT support of the application easier.

2. Why upgrade STD*MIS to Windows now when the plan is to migrate everyone to the NEDSS STD Program Area Module (PAM)?

The primary purpose behind the transition to Windows is to provide a more stable platform from which areas can migrate to the NEDSS PAM when it becomes available. It is still unclear as to when the PAM will become available and how long it will take for the project areas to actually implement it. Because support for older DOS applications is becoming more and more difficult, it was felt that STD*MIS needed to move to Windows in order for it to continue to operate reliably until such time as the NEDSS PAM becomes available.

3. What language is STD*MIS 4.0 written in and why was it chosen?

STD*MIS 4.0 was written using xBase++, a development environment from Alaska Software, Inc. xBase++ was developed specifically for transitioning DOS applications written in Clipper to Windows. It was chosen primarily because it allowed us to reuse approximately 80% of our existing code. With the limited resources available to this project, this was critical. Because the long-term goal is transition to NEDSS, it was felt that a complete re-write in a more mainstream environment such as Visual Basic or Java was not justified. Also, using xBase++ allowed us to easily retain the current user interface. This eliminated the need for significant end-user re-training.

4. Is there any change in the way data is stored Version 4.0?

Yes, the database format has undergone a change. In the DOS-based versions of STD*MIS, the data was stored using Foxpro 2.x data files (.dbf) and indexes (.cdx). STD*MIS 4.0 uses Visual Foxpro data 3.x (.dbf) and index files (.cdx). So while the file extensions haven't changed, the internal formatting of the files

has. The older Foxpro 2.x format is basically equivalent to the standard dBase III format while the Visual Foxpro format is very different.

This newer file format is the default format used by the xBase++ software and as such will provide greater performance and stability as compared to the older file format. The newer format is also more compatible with the Windows environment. Changing the file format was a difficult decision but we felt going with the newer format was the best way to achieve long-term stability and performance for the application. However, there was one exception to this format change. Please read the next FAQ (#5) for more details on this exception.

5. We use the Advantage Database Server software. Is it compatible with STD*MIS 4.0?

Yes, STD*MIS 4.0 will work with the Advantage Database Server. However, use of the Advantage Database Server does require that the data files remain in the older Foxpro 2.x format. To accommodate this requirement, STD*MIS 4.0 has been written to work with the new format in non-Advantage environments and to continue to work with the older format in Advantage environments. This does require us to maintain two separate versions of the database, one for Advantage sites and one for non-Advantage sites. This also means that moving the database from one environment to another (Advantage to non-Advantage or vice-versa) requires a database conversion before the system will function properly in the new environment.

6. Continuing with FAQ #5, does this mean that if I have STD*MIS running on an Advantage server, I can't just copy it down to my local workstation and use it without doing a data conversion?

Since you are moving the data from one environment to another (Advantage to non-Advantage), normally you would have to do a conversion. However, we are providing additional software that, when installed on the workstation, will allow you to run STD*MIS under Advantage on the workstation in the same way you run STD*MIS under Advantage on a remote server. Use of this additional software (called the Advantage Local Server) eliminates the need to do a data conversion when moving the data to a workstation from an Advantage server.

7. Will FDBU and other data tools I have still work with the new format?

That depends on whether the tool you use has the capability of reading Visual Foxpro files. Tools such as the current version of FDBU and EpiInfo 6.0 will not be able to read the new format. We will be providing an updated version of FDBU that will be able to read the new file format. Also, if you are using the Advantage

Database Server, then your data files continue to be in the older format (see #5 above) and so the older tools will continue to work. If you need to convert the new files to the older dBase format for analysis, etc., you have two options. Analysis extract files created by STD*MIS are always created in the older dBase format. Also, the new version of FDBU allows you to copy files from the new format to the old format using the Copy utility.

8. Are there other tools besides FDBU for maintaining the database?

Yes, there are several inexpensive tools available for database maintenance. A list of products that would be suitable replacements for tools such as FDBU and dSalvage is located at the end of this Q & A. We recommend at a minimum that you purchase a tool for examining and modifying data outside of the system (e.g. xDBU) and a tool for repairing corrupted files (e.g. Foxfix).

9. In the past, I had to configure certain files on the workstation to make STD*MIS work. Is there any workstation configuration necessary with 4.0?

Yes, there are three parameters that might need to be set in order for STD*MIS 4.0 to function optimally. The first parameter is to set a display font for the application to use. The second parameter is a path to the SAS software. The third parameter is a command to allow the Interview and Field Record print routines access to a printer. Whether or not these parameters need setting depends on the workstation environment. More detailed guidelines for using these parameters are contained in the installation instructions. These parameters are set from within STD*MIS so there are no external files that need modification. The parameters are stored locally in a file named WSCONFIG.DBF, which is located on the C drive in a folder labeled STDTEMP. This folder is also used for storing temporary files used in reporting and other system activities.

10. Do I need to have SAS installed in order to use STD*MIS 4.0?

No, you do not need to have SAS installed in order to use STD*MIS 4.0. You only need SAS if you wish to run the new SAS morbidity reports provided with STD*MIS 4.0. The current EpiInfo reports will remain operational; however, all new report development will be done using SAS so we recommend that areas install SAS and begin using the new reports as soon as practicable. There is a separate document that goes into more detail on installing SAS for use with STD*MIS.

11. How can I tell which reports are EpiInfo and which are SAS?

Included at the end of each report description in the report menu is the name of the tool used to produce the report. For example, one selection might read “Morbidity by Age/Race (EpiInfo)”. Any selection that doesn’t explicitly list the tool are “internal” reports written in xBase++ (e.g. worker statistic reports).

12. My area uses the Advantage Database Server. Is there anything special I need to do?

No. STD*MIS 4.0 contains the necessary software for connecting with the Advantage server and no additional configuration is needed. There is also no need to use separate versions of STD*MIS depending on what network protocol is used to access Advantage. The single version of STD*MIS 4.0 works in all Advantage environments. The only difference between Advantage and non-Advantage environments now is in the database format (see FAQ #5). Because of that, we will be maintaining separate installation files for Advantage vs. non-Advantage sites.

13. Should I run my current version of STD*MIS and STD*MIS 4.0 in tandem for a period of time just to test things out or should I just upgrade to 4.0 and begin using it immediately?

We recommend that you run the two systems in parallel for a while until you are comfortable with the performance of the new version. This would involve copying your current database to a separate test folder, performing the upgrade on the test data, and then using the test system on a limited basis. Continue normal entry into your 3.4 system and enter a subset of the data into the 4.0 system for testing purposes. Once you are comfortable with using the 4.0 system, you can then remove the test data, perform another upgrade on your current database, and begin using 4.0 full-time.

14. What version of STD*MIS should I be currently using in order to upgrade to Version 4.0?

You need to be using Version 3.4 in order to upgrade to Version 4.0. It does not matter which Version 3.4 you’re using (3.4, 3.4a, 3.4b), as long as it is a flavor of Version 3.4.

Third Party Products available for use with STD*MIS 4.0

Here is a sampling of some third party products that areas should consider investing in to help maintain their STD*MIS database. The two essentials are a database utility that will allow changes to the data outside of the system and a database repair utility to do repairs on corrupted or damaged files.

This list is not exhaustive and there certainly may be other products available that are not on this list. Please note that this does not constitute an endorsement of any particular product and all products should be evaluated thoroughly before being purchased.

1. FoxFix – Database repair utility
www.hallogram.com/foxfix/
\$249.00
2. xDBU – Windows-based database management utility.
www.cjcom.net/xdbucore.htm
\$119.00
3. Visual Foxpro – Ultimate database management tool for Foxpro data files.
msdn.microsoft.com/vfoxpro/
Version 8 (current version) - \$420 - \$650.00 Older versions may be available at a lower cost. Anything Version 5 and higher will work.
4. Visual DBU – Windows-based database management utility.
www.ds-datasoft.de/vdbu_e.html
\$180.00