



December 19, 2000

Dear Colleague:

As promised in my letter of December 7, 2000, I am sending you the enclosed specifications for collecting and reporting the decedent's race on death certificates, and for comparison, I am also enclosing specifications for the mother's race on birth certificates. As with the specifications for other items on the new U.S. Standard Certificates, these have been developed by George Van Amburg in collaboration with my staff in the Division of Vital Statistics. We would appreciate your reviewing these specifications, and we encourage your questions or comments.

According to the Revised Standards for Classification of Federal Data on Race and Ethnicity issued by the Office of Management and Budget in 1997, respondents are to be offered the option of selecting one or more racial designations. You have already seen how this standard was implemented in the 2000 decennial census and how a very similar format has been selected for the new U.S. Standard Certificates of Live Birth and Death and the Fetal Death Report. Given the necessity to use the Census Bureau's census data and postcensal population estimates, we trust the similar formats will yield the greatest comparability between numerator and denominator in the calculation of birth and death rates by race.

You will note that the enclosed specification for Mother's Race is considerably more simple than that for Decedent's Race. This is because it is assumed that mothers will generally be reporting for themselves using a worksheet with the same race format as on the birth certificate (as well as on the decennial census form), and the mother's race information can be entered directly into the electronic birth certificate as reported. In contrast, funeral directors may be much more likely to use worksheets that ask race in a different way, so the specifications provide relevant questions to probe for additional detail for American Indian or Alaska Native, Other Asian, Other Pacific Islander, and Other races. On both birth and death certificates, we are particularly anxious to capture literal (written) entries even when checkboxes have not been selected correctly or at all, because we cannot assume that an appropriate box will always be checked by mothers or funeral directors.

We will be developing software to edit the race data captured by the combined checkbox/literal responses. This software will eliminate redundancies (e.g., checking the "White" box and writing "Caucasian" on the "Other" line) and resolve inconsistencies (e.g., checking "Other Asian" and writing "Apache" on the "Other Asian" line.) The software will also include a dictionary of race entities and specified codes to reduce, and hopefully eliminate, the amount of manual coding required for literal entries. The software would presumably be implemented at the State level and not incorporated in EBC or EDC software installed in hospitals or funeral

homes. In the enclosed specifications, the section entitled Processing Variables includes 23 variables, MRACE# and RACE#, which represent the input data. Allowance is made for up to 8 literal entries, two on each of the 4 write-in lines. Note that (M)RACE16 thru (M)RACE23 are specific to the line and order where a literal is written; this location information will be used in the edit software. The section on NCHS Transmission Variables provides an additional 8 variables, (M)RACE16C thru (M)RACE23C, that will contain the codes assigned to the literal entries from the dictionary. Finally, (M)RACE1E thru (M)RACE8E will contain up to 8 codes produced by the edit software for use in tabulation procedures. NCHS wishes to obtain all of these variables in order to verify that the edit software is working properly in all locations.

If you have any specific or technical questions, you may wish to contact staff in the Mortality Statistics Branch (Donna Hoyert at 301-458-4279 or Ken Kochanek at 301-458-4319) or the Reproductive Statistics Branch (Joyce Martin at 301-458-4362 or Stephanie Ventura at 301-458-4547) or my office (Jim Weed at 301-458-4561). We would like to have your comments on the race specifications by January 19, 2001. You may e-mail your comments to Stephanie Ventura ([SVentura@cdc.gov](mailto:SVentura@cdc.gov)). Again, thank you in advance for your assistance with this phase of the implementation process.

Sincerely,

Mary Anne Freedman  
Director  
Division of Vital Statistics

2 Enclosures