

Birth Registry

Q.A. Bulletin

This bulletin is issued by the Arizona Department of Health Services Office of Vital Records as part of a continuing effort to improve the quality, completeness and accuracy of data submitted to the State's Vital Records System.

If you have any questions, please call us at 602-364-1252.

THE JUDICIOUS USE OF “UNKNOWN” WHEN REGISTERING A BIRTH!

In the United States, State laws require birth certificates to be completed for all births, and Federal law mandates national collection and publication of birth and other vital statistics data. The State Office of Vital Records (OVR) is monitored by the The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC) National Center for Health Statistics (NCHS) for accurate and reliable data after a birth is registered. The birth recorder has a critical role in the collection of such statistical data which ultimately benefits women and infants when health programs and policies are implemented at the national, state and local level. The State Office of Vital Records proactively monitors statistical data for this purpose.

From time to time, OVR will notice trends occurring in specific data areas that are questionable. One such trend includes a pronounced increase in the number of “Unknown” data for specific fields in the Electronic Birth Registration System (EBRS). Examples include: unknown mother's weight gain, education, month prenatal care began and number of prenatal visits.

Complete All Items

Weight Gained During Pregnancy In Pounds Weight Gain Unknown

Education

Unknown

Prenatal Care Began

Unknown

Total Prenatal Visits

Unknown



In many cases, the reported “unknown” data is false because the information is actually obtainable from a medical record or other hospital record. As a result, OVR spends much time processing hundreds of corrections each month for information that was, in reality, available to the birth recorder at the time of birth registration. OVR recognizes that there will be times when data will be legitimately unknown. A concern arises however when there appears to be a trend of high numbers of unknown data entries for the same field(s). High numbers of unknown data ultimately results in more work for the birth recorder who will need to obtain the medical record, verify that the data is truly unknown or have it corrected.

Additionally, it results in more work for vital records staff that must monitor, track and correct such data.

Another reason a birth recorder may report incomplete or unknown information is that they are not present when the parents are discharged thus they are not able to proofread the worksheet to see if it has been completed correctly or if clearly written. To remedy this, some hospitals have had weekend or after-hours staff trained by the State Office of Vital Records to ensure data integrity when collecting and reviewing the hospital worksheet. If you would like to have backup staff attend a birth recorder training session, a hospital supervisor or manager may contact the State Office of Vital Records at 602-364-1252.