



**STATE OF TENNESSEE**  
**Department of Health**  
**Office of Policy, Planning and Assessment**  
**Division of Health Statistics**  
**Cordell Hull Building, 4<sup>th</sup> Floor**  
**425 Fifth Avenue North**  
**Nashville, TN 37247-5262**

**HEALTH DATA RELEASE POLICY**

**SYSTEM NAME:** Marriage Statistical System

**DESCRIPTION:** This health data release policy applies to the release of individual-level records from the marriage statistical system. Computerized information for each marriage recorded in Tennessee\* is captured from marriage certificates. Included in this data file is identifying information (such as name and address of bride and groom), demographic information (such as race and age of bride and groom) and general information about the marriage (such as date and place of marriage). Other information from the marriage certificate, such as name of certifying official, is not maintained on the marriage data system.

\*It is important to note that not all Tennesseans marry in Tennessee, and not all those who marry in Tennessee are residents. This file includes all marriages recorded in Tennessee regardless of where the ceremony was performed.

**GENERAL ACCESSIBILITY:** Release of individual marriage records includes access to identifying information (such as name and address of bride and groom). Some data captured from the marriage certificate is considered confidential and access will be limited to approved research projects only (see **FIELDS DESIGNATED AS CONFIDENTIAL BY STATUTE** below).

Access to marriage data differs based on the type of request being made. Generally, there are three types of requests for marriage data: 1) research related requests, 2) requests to support program activities of local and state governmental agencies, and 3) requests from public agencies and businesses.

For research related requests, access to identifying and confidential information from individual marriage records for those events that are recorded in Tennessee can be provided once a **Request for Data** form is completed by the requester and the access to data has been approved by the Department of Health. All research related projects requesting access to confidential data with identifying factors where the individual will not be contacted must be approved by either an Institutional Review Board (IRB) or the Health Data Policy Committee. Reviews made by the Health Data Policy Committee will use the information provided on the **Request for Data** form. For research related requests where individuals or the families of individuals will be contacted during the project, the Department of Health's IRB must provide approval. If approved, research related requests may have access to marriage record information before it is considered final (see **ACCESS TO PROVISIONAL DATA** below).

For requests to support program activities of local and state governmental agencies, access to identifying information from individual marriage records for those events recorded in Tennessee can be provided once a **Request for Data** form is completed by the requester and the access to data has been approved by the Department of Health. If approved, governmental agency requests may have access to marriage record information before it is considered final (see **ACCESS TO PROVISIONAL DATA** below).

Note: If a governmental agency is doing research and needs access to confidential data, they must meet the requirements under research related requests.

HEALTH DATA RELEASE POLICY  
Marriage Statistical System (continued)

For public access to identifying information from marriage records, there will be a charge for file preparation. See CHARGE POLICY section below.

If the request is from the media (e.g., newspaper, radio, television, etc.), the Public Information Officer for the department should be notified before releasing the information.

**ACCESS TO PROVISIONAL DATA:** The term “provisional data” is used to describe a data file which is not considered to be finalized. For example, providing 2003 marriage records to a researcher during 2003 would mean providing access to provisional data. Not all 2003 marriage records would be available, and some data elements within individual records could be changed prior to the file being designated as “final”. (Most often, changes to data within the record occur when the original record is submitted with incomplete information or when the original record is submitted with inconsistent information.) Marriage data for each calendar year is normally considered final by September of the following year (e.g., 2003 marriage data was final by September, 2004).

Since provisional data indicates only a “snapshot” of the data at that point in time, data users need to be aware that a “snapshot” of the same data at a later point in time may reflect significant differences in any data summary or analysis.

**INFORMATION NOT ACCESSIBLE:**

**FIELDS DESIGNATED AS CONFIDENTIAL BY STATUTE:** In Tennessee, the following fields are considered confidential by statute:

- Race (bride and groom)
- Number of this marriage (bride and groom)
- How last marriage ended (bride and groom)
- Date last marriage ended (bride and groom)
- Education (bride and groom)

Confidential information with personal identifiers is accessible only to approved research projects.

**CHARGE POLICY:** Requests for public access to marriage data will be charged ten cents (\$0.10) per record plus processing costs of \$70 per annual data file for a computer file. The \$70 per annual data file charge covers the costs associated with processing the request for marriage information (including computer run time, output media, employee time, and mailing costs).

Access to individual-level marriage data may be provided at no charge to university-affiliated research organizations, Tennessee state and local government agencies, and other non-profit entities. Charges may be waived by the Commissioner for agencies who submit data to the Department in compliance with Tennessee statutes.

**PROVISION OF DATA:** All data will be supplied in a fixed format text file. Depending on the number of records, data will be supplied on floppy disk or 3480 cartridge.

**The data file will contain all records accessible for a given year and all variables EXCEPT those protected by statute (unless access to confidential data has been approved).** Requesters will be provided with documentation (code sheets and file layouts) to correctly interpret the data. Requesters will be required to customize the data set as needed to meet their needs.

**Data cannot be resold or released to any other organization.**

**BREACHES OF CONFIDENTIALITY:** The Department of Health may choose to take legal action if confidentiality is breached. Breaches of confidentiality will require the requestor to immediately cease use of the data, return all data to the department, and forfeit all rights to access data in the future.