

## MEPSnet: A New Interactive Statistical Tool

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AHRQ is the lead Federal agency charged with supporting research designed to improve the quality of health care, reduce its cost, address patient safety and medical errors, and broaden access to essential services. AHRQ sponsors and conducts research that provides evidence-based information on health care outcomes; quality; and cost, use, and access. The information helps health care decisionmakers—patients and clinicians, health system leaders, and policymakers—make more informed decisions and improve the quality of health care services.



U.S. Department of Health  
and Human Services  
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### What is MEPSnet?

MEPSnet is an online service that presents data from the Medical Expenditure Panel Survey (MEPS) in an easily used interactive format. MEPS, a survey of the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (AHRQ), provides nationally representative estimates of health care use, expenses, sources of payment, and insurance coverage for the U.S. population.

AHRQ releases MEPS data to the public in the form of public use data sets that need sophisticated programming resources and statistical software to account for the survey's complex design. Because the skills and resources available to the MEPS user community vary widely, MEPSnet was developed to provide immediate access to the MEPS data in a non-programming environment. It is quick, easy to use through a series of interactive queries, and provides even the most novice user the ability to generate national estimates in a few seconds.

MEPSnet is actually a set of statistical tools: MEPSnet/IC and MEPSnet/HC. These two tools use information gathered from establishments and household respondents, respectively.

### MEPSnet/IC

The MEPSnet/IC operates on data from the MEPS Insurance Component. Users can generate establishment-level and employee-level estimates of health insurance premiums by State, size of establishment, and other establishment characteristics of interest. MEPSnet/IC leads users through a series of questions to focus on the particular estimate of interest. In addition, users can perform analyses and generate graphs that track changes over a given time period. Appropriate standard errors are also included.

### MEPSnet/HC

The MEPSnet/HC operates on data from the MEPS Household Component. Users can generate nationally representative estimates of health insurance coverage and of health care use and expenditures for various subpopulations of interest. MEPSnet/HC presents users with a variety of variables they can use in their analyses. It includes detailed documentation and frequency information for each variable.

### Who uses MEPSnet?

Policymakers and health services researchers use MEPSnet. For example,



MEPSnet/IC has been used to help policymakers at the State level:

- To produce reports for State legislators and governors on the status of employer-sponsored health insurance in their State.
- To provide cost estimates and otherwise inform new health insurance proposals in the State.
- To track the effects of past changes in State health insurance policy.

But MEPSnet users are not restricted to researchers. MEPSnet is available to anyone who wants descriptive information on the Nation's use of health services.

In addition, health services researchers who are interested in using MEPS data in their analysis use MEPSnet to explore the MEPS data sets before committing the programming resources needed to perform their analyses.

### What questions can MEPSnet answer?

MEPSnet/HC has been used to answer the following types of questions:

- How do health care use and spending vary for different groups, such as the elderly, children, and women?
- What proportion of the U.S. population has health insurance coverage? What proportion is uninsured?
- How does health care use vary by the type of health insurance coverage held?

MEPSnet/IC has been used to answer the following types of questions:

- What do employers spend on health insurance and how do they share those costs with their employees?
- How do employer costs for health insurance and the types of plans offered vary by State and region?
- What types of establishments offer health insurance and what types of coverage do they offer?

### How do I use MEPSnet?

MEPSnet was developed so that users can generate statistics without extensive programming resources and knowledge. It therefore consists of a series of queries that walk the user through a step-by-step process. MEPSnet users:

1. Select the data file they want.
2. Select the variables of interest.
3. Can choose to recategorize the variables (e.g., combine ages to create age groups under 18 and 18 or over).
4. Can choose to focus on a particular subpopulation.
5. Select the specific statistics they want.

Help screens are available throughout MEPSnet.

MEPSnet is available through the MEPS Web site at

**[www.meps.ahrq.gov](http://www.meps.ahrq.gov)**

Updates to MEPSnet and the Web site are announced via the Web site's

**What's New?** page and through the MEPS mailing list and listserv.