



FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS (FAQ)

What is the Suicide Data Repository (SDR)?

The SDR was developed to store all mortality-related information to include suicide-related data for Service members and Veterans. The SDR is intended to support researchers and decision makers from the DoD and VA by serving as the integrated mortality data repository from the DoD, VA, and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). Since it contains information on all causes and manners of death, it allows for comprehensive understanding of suicide prevalence, contributing factors to suicide-related events, and the identification of mortality control groups to enhance understanding about suicide in the military.

What data is available from the SDR?

Current holdings in the SDR include the data sources listed below:

- a. CDC's National Death Index Plus (NDI+)
- b. Active Duty Master File (ADMF)
- c. Active Duty Transaction File (ADTF)
- d. Reserve Components Common Personnel Data System (RCCPDS) Master File
- e. RCCPDS Transaction File
- f. Defense Casualty Analysis System (DCAS)
- g. Military Veteran Mortality Database
- h. Veterans Health Administration User Master File

How often is the SDR data updated and where is it located?

The CDC updates the NDI+ annually. The Military Veteran Mortality Database (MVMDB) is updated on a monthly basis. The Defense Manpower Personnel Center (DMDC) hosts the SDR which contains mortality events recorded after 1978.

Who can access the SDR?

Principal investigators (PIs) for DoD- or VA-sponsored research or studies may request data from the SDR. The procedure involves submitting a data request on organizational letterhead, providing the information specified in SDR instructions. Third-party organizations, such as academic and other research organizations, may serve as co-investigators, but the PI must be a DoD or VA entity. Third parties to the request must complete required non-disclosure agreements and other information requirements.

What are appropriate uses of SDR data?

In addition to research, data requests are also valid for program evaluation, operational needs, or public health surveillance.

What is the Board of Governors (BoG)?

The SDR is managed through the SDR BoG, chartered in February 2014 as a DoD and VA co-chaired organization. The BoG mission is to oversee the SDR development and implementation as well as facilitate the process to access the data, manage responses to suicide data requests and ensure completion of all CDC data use agreements. The SDR BoG meets quarterly throughout the year.

What is the process to submit a data request?

DoD or VA research teams can obtain data by completing a data request form that is then reviewed by the SDR BoG. The requesting party must show that the research is sponsored by the DoD or VA and contain an Institutional Review Board (IRB) statement to indicate the research study has been



FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS (FAQ)

reviewed and approved according to federal guidelines. Additionally, it must illustrate a concrete need to receive mortality data, and identify the parameters required, including whether identified or de-identified data is requested. Finally, the requestors must affirm that all required data safeguards for use, storage, and dissemination will be followed. The key steps of the process are below:

1. Requests are submitted to the SDR BoG through the DoD or VA BoG Coordinator.
2. The BoG receives request packets and adjudicates (quarterly).
3. The SDR staff acknowledges receipt, and proceeds to review and coordinate with requestor.
4. The DMDC and the requestor are notified of status and coordinate data transfer (DD Form 2875 is required for DMDC account).

How long does it take to receive data after the data request?

The SDR BoG typically acts on data requests at its quarterly sessions. If no conditional requirements exist (i.e., minor administrative errors in the request, or questions from the BoG), the request is approved. The estimated timeframe for providing data is generally three weeks although unforeseen circumstances associated with some requests may add to that time period. The SDR co-coordinators will keep requestors informed if such circumstances arise.

Does the SDR provide PII or HIPAA information?

The SDR does not provide Personal Identifiable Information (PII) or Health Insurance Portability Authorization Act (HIPAA) information. The identified information that may be provided applies only to decedents; regulations do not recognize that as PII.

Is the data scrubbed or de-duplicated?

The DoD and VA have developed data-cleansing algorithms that produce a true death record through the combination of the SDR data source inputs.

Does the SDR provide identified or de-identified data?

- The SDR can provide both identified and de-identified data.
- De-identified data, being less sensitive, is considered an “exempted request,” and may be adjudicated by the SDR co-coordinators without resorting to, or waiting for a full BoG meeting.
- Identified data is considered a “full request” and must be adjudicated by the BoG in a quarterly meeting.
- Cases may arise that are time sensitive, even if identified data is requested. An “expedited request” can be processed if it meets certain requirements – a flag officer or senior executive service signature is required in these cases.

Is there a direct cost to requestors for SDR data and records?

There is no direct cost to the requestor for data provided by the SDR. Data storage, processing and safeguards within the requesting organization may have a cost.