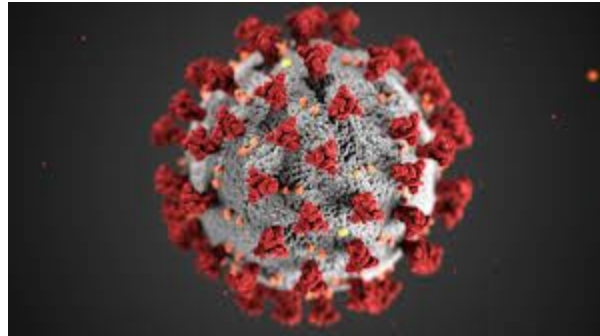


Census Bureau issues statement regarding coronavirus and upcoming count

March 17, 2020



On March 11, the U.S. Census Bureau said it is carefully monitoring the coronavirus (COVID-19) situation and will follow the guidance of federal, state and local health authorities. They have also established the Census Bureau COVID-19 Internal Task Force to continuously monitor the situation and update our Pandemic Addendum to the Census Bureau Continuity of Operations (COOP) Plan.

Their preparation and contingency planning centers on two key principles: “The health and safety of our staff and the public is of the utmost consideration and importance. We must fulfill our constitutional obligation to deliver the 2020 Census counts to the President of the United States on schedule, and we must adhere to our core task of counting everyone once, only once, and in the right place.”

The key message right now for anyone with questions about how COVID-19 will affect the 2020 Census: It has never been easier to respond on your own, whether online, over the phone or by mail — all without having to meet a census taker.

From March 12-20, households will receive the first of several invitations to participate in the 2020 Census.

The Census Bureau is encouraging everyone to respond online as soon as you receive your invitation with the provided instructions to go online. Instructions include the web address for the online questionnaire in English as well as where to respond online in 12 additional languages — ensuring over 99% of U.S. households can respond online in their preferred language.

The invitation will also include phone numbers for English and the 12 additional languages — ensuring over 99% of U.S. households can respond over the phone in their preferred language. Telephone assistance is available seven days a week for those who prefer to respond by phone.

Some households — in areas less likely to respond online — will receive a paper questionnaire in the first mailing; all households that have not responded online or by phone will receive a paper questionnaire between April 8 and April 16. The paper questionnaire includes a prepaid postage envelope to return it by mail.

Census takers plan to conduct the nonresponse followup operation in a handful of communities beginning as early as April 9, and across the country on May 13. Households can still respond on their own during this phase (online and phone response is available through July 31).

“The Census Bureau will closely follow guidance from public health authorities when conducting this operation, as we do when conducting all field operations. If we need to delay or discontinue nonresponse follow-up visits in a particular community, we will adapt our operation to ensure we get a complete and accurate count,” officials stated. “Currently, we are successfully conducting fieldwork for some of our non-decennial surveys by phone in areas where we are seeing an outbreak.”

Similarly, partnership specialists are working with local partners and conducting meetings that may have been in person by phone and teleconference.

“We designed our 2020 operations precisely so we could offer multiple ways to respond. In so doing, we are able to make necessary adaptations at the local level for special operations as well,” officials stated.

For instance, “group quarters,” the operation which counts people in nursing homes, college dorms, prisons and other institutional living facilities, includes a myriad of ways to respond, such as via eResponse, paper listing or self-enumeration by the facility. The same is true for “service-based enumeration” which counts people experiencing homelessness at the site where they receive services. The site administrators have multiple options for response.

“In short, where a community, facility or service organization makes a change that would affect any field operation, we will adapt to make sure we are getting the same population counted another way,” officials stated. We will work to share information about any change in operations with local authorities, community partners and the media. We will also work with community partners to continue to encourage self-response through the end of the nonresponse follow-up phase.”

The Census Bureau has a significant contingency budget to address costs of operational changes. As needed, they will hire additional workers, manage operations out of different offices or mail additional reminders or questionnaires to areas affected by an outbreak.

“We will continue to monitor the situation and take appropriate steps in consultation with public health authorities,” officials stated.