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**Joint ECE/Eurostat work session on statistical data confidentiality**  
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Topic (iv): Confidentiality issues for small areas

## **ZIP CODE TABULATION AREA AND CONFIDENTIALITY**

### **Contributed paper**

Submitted by the National Center for Health Statistics, Centers for Disease Control, United States<sup>1</sup>

Zip Code Tabulation Area (ZCTA) is a geographic coding scheme based upon a modification of Zone Improvement Plan (ZIP) codes that are postal delivery routes devised by U.S. Postal Service. The Bureau of the Census has been compiling census reports by minor civil divisions that are geographic areas based on Federal Information Processing Standard (FIPS). Beginning with the 2000 Census, the Bureau also compiled data by ZCTA codes after realigning the boundary lines of ZIP codes. Thus, a new geographic unit has become available for researchers in public health and statistics as an analytic tool in addition to counties, townships, boroughs, and census tracts, etc.

In this paper the authors will review the nature of ZIP codes and ZCTA codes to introduce the unique characteristics. Included topics are their shape; their size of population; and the possibility of compiling survey results by ZCTA converting from street addresses.

The Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act of 1996 (HIPAA) is intended as a strong protection for patient's medical information while improving access to care. Yet, it imposes strict regulation with a single combined consent form to allow researchers to obtain information. The impact of HIPAA on preserving personal confidentiality in public health research will be reviewed.

Also discussed will be the contribution of ZCTA as a new geographical unit with regard to convenience and effectiveness compared to the other conventional units for public health research. Discussion will also address ZCTA population size and the preservation of confidentiality.

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