

CIVIL REGISTRATION AND VITAL STATISTICS IN AMERICAN SAMOA

American Samoa comprises five main islands and two coral atolls situated on the eastern border of the international date line. It lies southeast of Samoa (Western), west of Cook Islands, north of Tonga and south of Tokelau. American Samoa is the southernmost territory of the United States of America (USA), and one of two US territories south of the Equator, along with the uninhabited Jarvis Island.



Land area
(km²)
199

2020 mid-year
population estimate
56,800

Population growth
rate (%)
0.3



Pacific
Community
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Pacific CRVS
supported by Brisbane Accord Group

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OVERVIEW

This civil registration and vital statistics (CRVS) country profile for American Samoa is part of a series of country profiles for the Pacific Island region. The CRVS profiles consolidate knowledge shared by countries on the status of their CRVS systems in the recent past, including through government websites, published reports, media releases and presentations, and direct engagement between the authors of these profiles and in-country civil registration offices and health information offices. The objective of these CRVS country profiles is to provide a living resource (updated every 2-3 years) and quick reference point on the status and developments in CRVS systems in the Pacific Island region. The profiles provide an overview of the legislative, organisational and management frameworks of CRVS systems, registration processes, levels of completeness of birth and death registration, and the most recent developments towards improving CRVS systems. Whilst civil registration covers many vital events, these profiles focus on the registration of births and deaths, and collation of cause of death information. It is envisaged that these country profiles will serve as a fundamental tool in advocating for further investment in strengthening the coverage and completeness of CRVS systems across the Pacific Island region.

SOURCE OF BIRTH AND DEATH DATA

The source of figures in Table 1 (births) and Table 2 (deaths) is outlined below each table, with the full citation given in the Reference section at the end of the document. All figures were obtained from published sources or through direct contact with in-country civil registration offices and health information offices. The date figures were obtained through direct in-country contact is stated below the tables, and indicates when those figures were extracted from in-country databases.

SUGGESTED CITATION

Pacific Community and United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) 2021. Civil registration and vital statistics in American Samoa. Noumea, New Caledonia: Pacific Community.

FURTHER INFORMATION

For further information please contact the Statistics for Development Division (SDD) – Pacific Community at: contact-sdd@spc.int; <https://sdd.spc.int/>

CRVS LEGISLATION, ORGANIZATION AND MANAGEMENT

Current legal framework governing birth and death registration

The recording and registration of births and deaths in American Samoa is governed by the American Samoa Code, Title 13, Chapter 5 Vital Statistics (1962) (amended 1968, 1979, 1990); and the American Samoa Statistical Act (2003).

Agencies responsible for birth and death recording and registration

The Department of Medical Services is responsible for the recording of births and deaths in health facilities and the community. Collation of these records at the national level is undertaken by the Health Information Management Department, located at the only hospital in American Samoa, the Lyndon B. Johnson (LBJ) Tropical Medical Center on the main island of Tutuila. The Department of Homeland Security is responsible for overseeing the civil registration of births and deaths. The civil registration office is referred to as the Vital Statistics Office, and the civil registrar is referred to as the Registrar of Vital Statistics. The Vital Statistics Office facilitates registrations of births and deaths, and is also responsible for the issuance of national ID cards.

National CRVS committee and CRVS action plan

American Samoa has a functional CRVS committee, created after the 2014 Ministerial Conference on CRVS in Asia and the Pacific. Members of the committee are: the Department of Medical Services; the Department of Homeland Security, the Vital Statistics Office; the LBJ Medical Center; the Department of Commerce, Statistics ; and the Office of the Attorney General.

National ID systems

American Samoa has a national ID system.

REPORTING AND REGISTRATION OF BIRTHS

Recording births at health facilities and registering births at the civil registry

The Department of Medical Services is required to complete birth notification forms (referred to as birth certificates under the law) for all births that occur in health facilities in American Samoa, and to forward these to the Registrar of Vital Statistics. For births that occur outside a health facility, the law requires that the birth of every child be reported promptly to the *pulenu'u* (mayor) of the village where the child was born, together with any particulars the *pulenu'u* may request. The *pulenu'u* is tasked, under the law, to report all such births (which are rare) to the Department of Medical Services. Application for a birth certificate can be made through the Vital Statistics Office, or through an electronic online system called VitalChek (<http://www.vitalchek.com>). The online system is mostly utilised by American Samoans living off-island who are seeking a copy of their birth certificate.

Timeframes and costs

The law states that the Department of Medical Services (LBJ Medical Center) should forward birth notification forms to the Registrar of Vital Statistics as soon as possible, but in no event more than six months after the birth. For births that occur in the community, which are very few, the *pulenu'u* of the village where the child was born should report the birth to the Department of Medical Services within 10 days of the event.

Standard, on-time birth registration	no charge
Birth certificate printed	5.00 (USD)
Birth certificate ordered online	22.75 (USD)*
Amendments	7.00 (USD)

*Covers the Agency Certificate Fee and the VitalChek Processing Fee. The cost of shipping the record is not included.

Tasks that require a birth certificate and incentives (financial or other) for completing the birth registration process

A birth certificate is required for filing tax returns, for accessing social services and social security benefits, and for enrolment in school.

Registration process for births occurring overseas

Mothers are rarely referred off-island to give birth, unless warranted by health complications or issues. In such cases, babies born by off-island referrals are not automatically captured or recorded in the local civil registry (ASG and SPC 2015).

REPORTING AND REGISTRATION OF DEATHS

Recording deaths at health facilities and registering deaths at the civil registry

The Department of Medical Services is required to complete death notification forms (referred to as death certificates under the law) for all births that occur in health facilities in American Samoa, and to forward these to the Registrar of Vital Statistics. For deaths that occur outside a health facility, the law requires that the death be reported promptly to the *pulenu'u* (mayor) of the village where the death occurred, together with any particulars the *pulenu'u* may request. The *pulenu'u* is tasked, under the law, to report all deaths to the Department of Medical Services.

Application for a death certificate cannot be made through the electronic online VitalChek system.

Timeframes and costs

The law states that the Department of Medical Services (LBJ Medical Center) should forward death notification forms to the Registrar of Vital Statistics as soon as possible, but in no event more than six months after the death.

Standard, on-time death registration	no charge
Death certificate printed	5.00 (USD)
Amendments	7.00 (USD)

Tasks that require a death certificate and incentives (financial or other) for completing the death registration process

A death certificate is required for inheritance of land, property, and estates of deceased persons.

Registration process for deaths occurring overseas

American Samoa has a medical referral program whereby critically ill patients can be sent to the United States, commonly Hawaii, and sometimes to New Zealand and other countries for medical treatment. Deaths that occur in these countries following medical referral are often brought back to American Samoa for burial. Overseas deaths are not, however, automatically captured or recorded in the local civil registry.

COLLATION AND CLASSIFICATION OF CAUSE OF DEATH

Process and timeframes for coding of death certificates

The coding of deaths is currently conducted using the ICD-9 format but there are plans under way to update to ICD-10. The American Samoa Vital Statistics Report 2010–2012 found that 7% of the deaths analysed in the report were classified as ill-defined, or had not been assigned an underlying cause of death (ASG and SPC 2015).

COMPLETENESS OF CIVIL REGISTRATION DATA

The completeness of birth and death registration can be estimated by comparing the number of births and deaths in the civil registry with the number of births and deaths recorded by the health system, enumerated during national censuses, and estimated by international agencies. In some countries in the Pacific region, the births and deaths of citizens overseas can be registered in the civil registry. When estimating completeness, it is best that these overseas births and deaths are not included in the civil registry figures, since the other sources they are compared to, such as health records, do not include overseas events. In American Samoa, overseas births and deaths are not automatically captured or recorded in the local civil registry, and have not been included in the figures in Tables 1 and 2.

Table 1 shows that, between 2010 and 2018, birth registration completeness, when compared to health records, remained above 90%, except in 2012 and 2014, when it was estimated to be around 88% and 75%, respectively. From 2015 to 2018, the estimated completeness exceeded 100%. Comparison with the 2010 census is not possible, as the census did not ask questions on annual births; whilst comparison with the SPC projection showed an estimated completeness of around 75%. The reason for the greater than 100% completeness of the civil registry since 2015 compared to health records requires further investigation, as does the difference in the completeness estimate for 2018 for health (104%) and the SPC projection (75%).

Table 1. Completeness of birth registration data

Year	Source of births				Completeness of birth registration		
	Civil Registry ^a	Health ^b	SPC projection ^c	Census ^d	Compared with health	Compared with SPC	Compared with census
2018	946	912	1,256	-	104%	75%	-
2017	1,040	1,001	-	-	104%	-	-
2016	1,096	1,013	-	-	108%	-	-
2015	1,150	1,096	-	-	105%	-	-
2014	811	1,084	-	-	75%	-	-
2013	1,061	1,161	-	-	91%	-	-
2012	1,034	1,175	-	-	88%	-	-
2011	1,178	1,287	-	-	92%	-	-
2010	1,164	1,279	-	-	91%	-	-

Sources: ^a2010–2016 Homeland Security, Office of Vital Registration (HSOVR 2017), 2017–2018 obtained directly from the Vital Statistics Office on 04.02.2021.

^b2010–2017 Health Information Management Department, LBJ Tropical Medical Center (DoCSD 2018), 2018 obtained directly from the Vital Statistics Office on 04.02.2021.

^cCalculated from 2018 crude birth rate (Pacific Community 2018a) and 2018 population projection (Pacific Community 2018b). ^dThe most recent census in 2010 did not ask questions on annual births, and therefore could not be used to estimate the completeness of birth registration. Completeness was calculated by dividing «Civil Registry» by «Health», and «Civil Registry» by «SPC projection».

Table 2 shows that, between 2010 and 2018, the estimated completeness of death registration when compared to health records exceeded 100% for most years. Comparison with the 2016 census was not possible, as the census did not ask questions on annual all-age mortality. Comparison with the SPC projection showed an estimated completeness of around 98%. The reason for greater than 100% completeness of the civil registry when compared to health records requires further investigation.

Table 2. Completeness of death registration data

Year	Source of deaths				Completeness of death registration		
	Civil Registry ^a	Health ^b	SPC projection ^c	Census ^d	Compared with health	Compared with SPC	Compared with census
2018	315	298	322	-	106%	98%	-
2017	317	310	-	-	102%	-	-
2016	289	280	-	-	103%	-	-
2015	308	314	-	-	98%	-	-
2014	270	259	-	-	104%	-	-
2013	279	270	-	-	103%	-	-
2012	286	282	-	-	101%	-	-
2011	284	283	-	-	100%	-	-
2010	222	247	-	-	90%	-	-

Sources: ^a2010–2016 Homeland Security, Office of Vital Registration (HSOVR 2017), 2017–2018 obtained directly from the Vital Statistics Office on 04.02.2021.

^b2010–2017 Health Information Management Department, LBJ Tropical Medical Center (DoCSD 2018), 2018 obtained directly from the Vital Statistics Office on 04.02.2021.

^cCalculated from 2018 crude death rate (Pacific Community 2018a) and 2018 population projection (Pacific Community 2018b). ^dThe most recent census in 2010 did not ask questions on annual all age mortality, and therefore could not be used to estimate the completeness of death registration. Completeness was calculated by dividing «Civil Registry» by «Health», and «Civil Registry» by «SPC projection».

PUBLICATION OF CRVS DATA AND REPORTS

The Statistics Division of the Department of Commerce of American Samoa collaborates with the LBJ Medical Center and the Department of Homeland Security Office of Vital Statistics to consolidate and publish data on births, deaths and marriages in the American Samoa Statistical Yearbook. The yearbook series contains vital events, usually published for the last ten years. The latest yearbook was published in 2018 and includes data for the years 2007–2017. In 2015, American Samoa also produced a comprehensive vital statistics report covering births, deaths and causes of death for 2010 to 2012.

RECENT INITIATIVES AND PLANS TO STRENGTHEN CRVS

1. The CRVS Committee is working with the Attorney General's Office to recommend and implement changes to the vital statistics law. The current law does not make provisions to support data-sharing or the use of IT for civil registration purposes.
2. The CRVS Committee plans to develop a CRVS comprehensive multi-sectoral strategy document, as well as a CRVS monitoring and implementation plan.
3. The CRVS Committee is working with the Governor's Office in officiating and adopting a CRVS executive order that will call for the establishment of a CRVS task force to oversee the implementation of the central registry system that aims to provide legal identity for all. It will also provide detailed demographic data to support targeted planning and policy interventions to reduce inequalities within the population.

REFERENCES

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