

## Lies, damned lies, and statistics

John Eyers provides details and links to eight leading sources of essential health data and information available free of charge on the web



It was the American author Mark Twain who quoted the 19<sup>th</sup> century British Prime Minister Benjamin Disraeli as saying 'There are three kinds of lies: lies, damned lies, and statistics!' Disraeli was of course disparaging the use of statistics to support weak or false arguments. Nowadays statistics are used with great effect to support well-researched true statements and are an essential component in understanding more easily worldwide patterns of morbidity and mortality. The following are a selection of statistical sources for the world's health; the first in the list – Gapminder – is an imaginative resource encompassing health statistics and other global development indicators, developed by a charismatic Swedish statistician called Hans Rosling – see his mini-lecture on global population growth on YouTube (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fTznEIZRkLg>). I recommend you try it!

**Gapminder** (<http://www.gapminder.org>)  
Founded in 2005 to promote sustainable global development and to support the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) by using time series and 'by converting boring numbers into enjoyable, animated, and interactive graphics.' Data for 259 countries are included from, where available, 1800 to the present day, for 498 different indicators, many of which are health-related and derived from the UN agencies such as the World Health Organization and World Bank. Free software needs to be downloaded from the web site to use it effectively, and encouragement is given for its use in schools and universities.

**Demographic and Health Surveys** (<http://www.measuredhs.com>)  
A comprehensive series of country reports containing data on population and health from most sub-Saharan African countries. These include accurate and regularly updated data on fertility, family planning, maternal and child health, gender, HIV/AIDS, malaria, and nutrition – most countries now have reports over several years enabling health progress monitoring, all of which

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As a member of HIFA2015 (<http://www.hifa2015.org/>), John Eyers believes one of the biggest challenges for improved health in less-developed countries is ensuring that equal access to appropriate and evidence-based health information is made available to all. John would be delighted to receive comments and suggestions for future articles. Email him on: [johneyers@hotmail.com](mailto:johneyers@hotmail.com).

are available to download free in PDF. It also has both a Statcompiler and Statmapper, allowing customised tables and maps to be used in users' own reports, and Malaria and HIV/AIDS indicators databases.

**African Statistics** (<http://www-sul.stanford.edu/depts/ssrg/africa/statistics.html>)  
A huge alphabetical list from Stanford University of links to African statistics with a large health content, from government ministries and international organisations.

**UN Statistics** (<http://unstats.un.org/unsd/default.htm>)  
Provides global data on economics, social and demographic, environment and energy, MDGs. It has also attempted to collect together under one database – UN-Data (<http://data.un.org>) – 32 of the UN agencies' databases so that they can be searched together either by subject or by country.

**UNAIDS** (<http://unaids.org/en/dataanalysis>)  
Country and global statistics and projections for HIV/AIDS over a number of years, as well as epidemiological monitoring data.

**UNICEF** (<http://www.childinfo.org>)  
Data on children are collected under a number of topics and by country: child survival and health, child nutrition, maternal health, education, newborn care, HIV/AIDS, MDGs. A number of special focus reports are also included. Its main statistical report is *The State of the World's Children* ([http://www.childinfo.org/publications\\_smsbytheme.html](http://www.childinfo.org/publications_smsbytheme.html)) which is subdivided by theme.

**WHO** ([http://www.who.int/healthinfo/global\\_burden\\_disease/en/](http://www.who.int/healthinfo/global_burden_disease/en/))  
A vast array of data and statistics on world health and for individual countries. For global health statistics, general world health statistics and country health systems surveillance see WHO Global Health Observatory (GHO) (<http://www.who.int/gho/en>) – WHO's portal providing access to data and analyses for monitoring the global health situation. It provides critical data for key health themes, as well as direct access to the full database. The GHO presents data from all WHO programmes and provides links to supporting information. The WHO Statistical Information System (WHOSIS) has been upgraded and incorporated into the GHO.

**WHO Regional Office for Africa** (<http://www.afro.who.int/en/countries.html>)  
Data on the current health profile for each African country is represented.