

Census 2020 FAQs

How do I respond to the Census? The 2020 Census will be the first Census to offer an online response option. Everyone has the option of taking the Census on paper, over the phone or online, whichever you prefer. Most households (80%) will receive a letter in the mail, inviting them to respond online with a unique identification code. With the identification code, you will be able to fill out the 2020 Census online. If you do not respond online using the identification code provided in the mail, a paper questionnaire will be sent to you which you can fill out and mail back to the Census Bureau. If you do not respond to the paper questionnaire, individual Census takers will try to contact you by knocking on your door. The other 20% of households, mostly seniors and people with no internet will be sent a paper questionnaire to be completed and returned by mail. Those mailings will also include the option to complete the survey online.

Is it safe to provide my information to the Census Bureau over the Internet? Yes. The US Census Bureau will keep your responses to the survey safe, secure and encrypted at all times. The US Census Bureau is only tabulating the data collected from your survey anonymously and on a broad scale. There are several legal protections which exist to safeguard your privacy and the confidentiality of your responses. The Census Act (also known as Title 13) includes strict confidentiality provisions prohibiting any employees of the Commerce Department or Census Bureau from using information collected via the decennial census for anything other than the production of statistical datasets. Additionally, Title 13 prohibits any federal, state and local agencies from using data collected via the decennial census to the “detriment” of any individual who responded to the survey from which the dataset is built.

Your individual information is protected under a federal law known as the “72-year rule” which mandates that individual-level records are protected for 72 years after the census is taken. For privacy reasons, access to personally identifiable information contained in decennial census records is restricted to all but the individual named on the record or their legal heir for 72 years.

What if I just sit the Census out? Why should I share my information with the US Census Bureau? A fair and accurate Census is one of the most significant civil rights and economic justice issues facing our country today.

In addition to ensuring fair political representation, enforcing civil rights laws, and effective policy planning, census data are used to distribute federal, state, and local resources equitably and prudently. In fact, federal agencies use census data to allocate billions of dollars each year for vital community services such as hospitals, job training centers, schools, senior centers, bridges, tunnels and other public works projects, and emergency response.

Communities of color, urban and rural low-income households, immigrants, and young children are all at risk of being missed by the Census. Being undercounted deprives already vulnerable communities of fair representation and vital community resources.

What if I am not a US citizen, does the Census still count me? Yes. The U.S. Constitution requires that the Census counts every resident in the United States regardless of their immigration status. All people should be counted to ensure that our community is fully counted.