

# Socioeconomic Characteristics for Maryland's Incorporated and Unincorporated Areas & Jurisdictions

*2005 – 2007 Three-Year Estimates*



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### **What is the American Community Survey (ACS)? What are Three-Year Estimates?**

The American Community Survey (ACS) is a nationwide survey designed to collect demographic, social, economic, and housing data every year. The U.S. Census Bureau releases data from the ACS in the form of both single-year and multiyear estimates. Unlike previous Census Bureau data products, the ACS is not concerned with creating population counts, but with collecting data on population characteristics.

In the past, population characteristics were collected every ten years through the “long form” of the decennial Census, which was sent to a sample of the total population (approximately one in six households in 2000). The ACS replaces this form with a program that samples 250,000 unique households per month, or 3 million per year. By the end of five years, the ACS will still have a smaller sample size than the decennial Census.

This rolling sample allows population characteristics for large areas (those over 65,000 in population) to be reported yearly, instead of once every ten years under the previous “long form” system. Characteristics for areas containing between 20,000 and 65,000 persons are reported as three-year averages, as not enough households are sampled in one year to give reliable estimates. Characteristics for areas containing less than 20,000 persons, again due to their small size, are reported as five-year averages. These differences from the old system mean that ACS data is more timely, but is not possible to pinpoint a particular point in time. For more information on the ACS, how the data is collected, and how it should be used, please refer to *A Compass for Understanding and Using American Community Survey Data: What General Data Users Need to Know* (October 2008), available online from the U.S. Census Bureau at: <http://www.census.gov/acs/www/Downloads/ACSGeneralHandbook.pdf>.

### **What is a Margin of Error (MoE)?**

Because the ACS is a sample of a population, its results are subject to error. This error also existed in the previous “long form”, but due to the larger sample size it was generally not reported by the Census Bureau. Because of the methodology and the smaller sample sizes used to create the ACS, the reported data may have larger errors than experienced data users are used to seeing. The Census Bureau now reports a margin of error (MoE) based on a 90 percent confidence level that allows data users to understand just how accurate the data is and how it should be used. Generally, three-year average estimates will have a smaller MoE than one-year estimates, and five-year average estimates (when they are released) will have the smallest MoE. For more information on this subject, please refer to *Accuracy of the 2005-2007 ACS 3-Year Data*, available online from the U.S. Census Bureau at <http://www.census.gov/acs/www/Downloads/ACS/accuracy2005-2007.pdf>.

### **How do Population Estimates Available in the ACS differ from those from the Population Estimates Program (PEP)?**

The ACS does not determine the estimate of the total population of counties and incorporated areas. Total population estimates for these areas are based on the Census Bureau’s Population Estimates Program (PEP) and are not reported with margins of error (MoEs) as are other ACS data. The Census Bureau recommends using housing and population totals and age, sex, race, and Hispanic ethnicity estimates from the PEP for counties and total population for municipalities. Areas such as Census Tracts and Census Designated Places (CDPs) are not included in the PEP, so population data from these areas is estimated using ACS survey data and therefore have MoEs associated with them. Geographic areas whose populations have been estimated under the PEP have “\*\*\*\*\*” in the MoE column. Data representing the various characteristics reported through the ACS are weighted to the PEP estimates. To view PEP data for the State of Maryland, please visit the website for the Maryland State Data Center at [http://www.mdp.state.md.us/msdc/dw\\_postCen2000\\_PopEst.htm](http://www.mdp.state.md.us/msdc/dw_postCen2000_PopEst.htm).

### **What is a CDP?**

CDP stands for *Census Designated Place*, defined by the Census Bureau as a “statistical entity, defined for each decennial census according to Census Bureau guidelines, comprising a densely settled concentration of population that is not within an incorporated place, but is locally identified by a name. CDPs are delineated cooperatively by State and local officials and the Census Bureau, following Census Bureau guidelines.” (<http://www.census.gov/geo/www/GARM/glosGARM.pdf>)

# General Demographics

From the American Community Survey's  
2005 – 2007 Three-Year Estimates

# Economic Characteristics

From the American Community Survey's  
2005 – 2007 Three-Year Estimates