Tracks FAQs
What Are Suppressed Data And How Can It Be Used?

[Announcer] This podcast is presented by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. CDC—safer, healthier people.

[Desiree Robinson] Hello everyone. I'm Desiree Robinson. Thank you for tuning in to the Tracks FAQs Podcast, where we explore topics about CDC's National Environmental Public Health Tracking Network. In this podcast series, CDC scientists address frequently asked questions about the National Tracking Network, including using and applying data, running queries, and much more. Epidemiologist Heather Strosnider joins us to answer one of our top Tracking Network questions. Thanks for joining us, Heather.

[Heather Strosnider] Thank you.

[Desiree Robinson] Here's one of our top questions….*When I look at the tracking information for my state, a lot of counties have their data suppressed and I cannot get a clear picture or pattern. How can I get a better view of the data?*

[Heather Strosnider] There are several reasons for this. Some of the health conditions included on the Tracking Network are rare. When we look at data from a small geographic area, such as a county, often there are only a few cases. When there are very few cases, the Tracking Network will suppress or withhold these data. We do so because we can't be confident in the rate derived from the data. The Network also suppresses the data to protect the confidentiality of residents in those states or counties where there are rare health conditions.

To strengthen the data from small geographic areas, the Tracking Network offers a "smoothed view." It's like an average for a geographic area. The results come from combining data from one county with data from neighboring counties; then the Network calculates an average to allow a pattern to emerge within the area. So the smoothed view is an *average* over *many* counties. It shouldn't be interpreted as the rate for one particular county.

A smoothed view is available for rates within a state. If you want to generate a smoothed view, conduct a query as you normally would. Select all the counties for which you want the view and make sure they are all within one particular state. Then check the box "Apply smoothing to view patterns across counties."

[Desiree Robinson] I would like to thank CDC Epidemiologist Heather Strosnider for joining us for this episode of Tracks FAQs. Thank you, Heather.

[Heather Strosnider] Thanks, Desiree.

[Desiree Robinson] That's all for this episode of Tracks FAQs. To submit a question for a CDC Tracking expert to address in this series, please e-mail trackingsupport@cdc.gov.

[Announcer] For the most accurate health information, visit www.cdc.gov or call 1-800-CDC-INFO 24/7.