

2023 Limitations of Data Comparability Across States

The County Health Rankings use data from many sources, each with different methods for collection and processing of the data. For most of our measures, county data is comparable between counties within states and also comparable across state lines. For a few of our measures, caution must be exercised when making comparisons between counties in different states.

Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System (BRFSS) measures	Measures: Poor or Fair Health, Adult Smoking, Adult Obesity, Poor Physical Health Days, Poor Mental Health Days, Excessive Drinking, Physical Inactivity, Diabetes Prevalence, Frequent Physical Distress, Frequent Mental Distress, Insufficient Sleep Measures using BRFSS data are modeled and include state-level effects that may introduce error when compared across states, such as overestimating differences in border counties in different states.
HIV Prevalence	Some states offer anonymous HIV testing and these test results are not included in the national registry system.
Food Environment Index	Statistical models used to create the Food Environment Index include state-level effects that may overestimate differences in border counties in different states. Comparison of counties within a state will be more reliable than comparison of counties across states.
Sexually Transmitted Infections	Chlamydia screening patterns may vary between states and health care systems. Differences in rates may reflect differences in these screening patterns, rather than differences in the underlying rates of disease.
Food Insecurity	Statistical models that estimate food insecurity include state-level effects that may overestimate differences between border counties in different states. Comparison of counties within a state will be more reliable than comparison of counties across states.
Unemployment	The statistical model used to estimate unemployment may vary by state. More information about methodology is available from the data source.
High School Graduation	States use different methods to determine who is in a high school cohort. This means that each state considers students who transfer, disenroll, are incarcerated, or have special needs differently. States also differ in how they include online schools.

County Health Rankings & Roadmaps

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Living Wage	This measure includes the cost of child care. Child care cost data are based on market-rate surveys reported separately by state, published in different years. Some states only report state- or region-level estimates, and thus require county-level imputation. Due to this, states may differ in the extent to which estimates are modeled vs. observed.
Children Eligible for Free or Reduced Price Lunch	States are not required to participate in free or reduced price lunch programs. States can also vary on eligibility criteria, namely whether children of Medicaid recipients are eligible.
Child Care Cost Burden	Child care cost data are based on market-rate surveys reported separately by state, published in different years. Some states only report state- or region-level estimates, and thus require county-level imputation. Due to this, states may differ in the extent to which estimates are modeled vs. observed.
Child Care Centers	Child care centers are regulated by state licensing. Definitions of child care facilities vary by state. Data were acquired from respective states and therefore may be subject to reporting differences.
Juvenile Arrests	Juvenile Arrests may vary across states due to different reporting practices, arrest rules and laws, as well as different juvenile age limits. Additionally, some states report calendar year estimates while other states use fiscal year estimates.
Voter Turnout	Voter turnout at the county level is heavily influenced by state laws which may restrict or support voting access. Voter Turnout does not reflect civic participation of people who have lost their voting rights due to certain interactions with the judicial system or because of a mental disability.
Census Participation	Census data collection strategies vary by geographic area. Data collection strategies may target specific populations who live in an area or specific geographic characteristics of a region. The census advises against comparison across state lines.
Traffic Volume	States collect and report these data differently. Traffic counts are performed by state Departments of Transportation.