



2024 Limitations of Data Comparability Across States

The data used in our Annual Data Release come from many sources, each with different methods for data collection and processing. 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.

| | |
|---|--|
| <p>Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System (BRFSS) measures</p> | <p>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</p> <p>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.</p> |
| <p>Small Area Health Insurance Estimates measures</p> | <p>Measures: Uninsured, Uninsured Adults, Uninsured Children</p> <p>The data source uses modeling. While it is possible to compare across states, using the upper bound approximation to the margin of error (MOE), not the exact MOE, is suggested.</p> |
| <p>Small Area Income and Poverty Estimates measures</p> | <p>Measures: Children in Poverty, Median Household Income</p> <p>The Small Area Income and Poverty Estimates uses model-based estimates for different states and counties in the same year. They advise against comparing estimates across states.</p> |
| <p>Census Participation</p> | <p>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.</p> |
| <p>Child Care Centers</p> | <p>Child care centers are regulated by state licensing. Definitions of child care facilities vary by state. Data were acquired from respective states; therefore, they may be subject to reporting differences.</p> |
| <p>Child Care Cost Burden</p> | <p>Childcare cost data are based on data reported by each state to the Department of Labor’s Women’s Bureau, published in different years. Some states only report state- or region-level estimates; thus, they require county-level imputation. Due to this, states may differ in how estimates are modeled vs. observed.</p> |
| <p>Children Eligible for Free or Reduced Price Lunch</p> | <p>States differ in the definition of children who are eligible for free or reduced price lunch. States may report the number of students eligible for free lunch by direct certification, the number of students eligible for free and reduced price lunch, or both.</p> |





| | |
|--|---|
| Drinking Water Violations | Data may vary in quality across states and be impacted by differing state-level enforcement. |
| 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. |
| 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. |
| HIV Prevalence | Some states offer anonymous HIV testing and these test results are not included in the national registry system. |
| 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. |
| Living Wage | Cost of living estimates are influenced by state policies and practices that limit comparison of a county values across state borders. |
| Residential Segregation – Black/White | Data source is only available for this measure for counties with a Black population of at least 100 persons; thus, comparisons between more racially homogenous states and more racially heterogeneous states are not recommended. |
| School Segregation | There are inconsistencies between states in how students in schools run by Bureau of Indian Education (BIE) are counted. In states that provide support to federal BIE schools, students at these schools may be double counted in National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) data. |
| 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. |
| Traffic Volume | States collect and report these data differently. Traffic counts are performed by state Departments of Transportation. |
| 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. |