

2025 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 are 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: Adult Smoking, Adult Obesity, Diabetes Prevalence, Excessive Drinking, Feelings of Loneliness, Frequent Mental Distress, Frequent Physical Distress, Insufficient Sleep, Lack of Social and Emotional Support, Physical Inactivity, Poor or Fair Health, Poor Mental Health Days, Poor Physical Health Days, % Disability: Functional Limitations 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.
Small Area Health Insurance Estimates measures	Measures: Uninsured, Uninsured Adults, Uninsured Children 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.
Small Area Income and Poverty Estimates measures	Measures: Children in Poverty, Median Household Income The Small Area Income and Poverty Estimates uses model-based estimates for different states and counties in the same year. The source advises against comparing estimates across states.
Adverse Climate Events	Climate events and their impacts differ across the country. When these events lead to disasters, governors must ask the president for a disaster declaration if local and state resources aren't enough. The decision to request a declaration, along with available resources, varies by state.
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.
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; therefore, they may be subject to reporting differences.
Child Care Cost Burden	Child care 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-level or regional estimates; thus, they require county-level imputation. Due to this, states may differ in how estimates are modeled vs. observed.



Children Eligible for Free or Reduced Price Lunch	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.
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.
Library Access	Library system differences in reporting periods and variations in methods used to count visits can impact comparability for this measure.
Living Wage	Cost of living estimates are influenced by state policies and practices that limit comparison of 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.
Unemployment	The method and/or source of data used by the Bureau of Labor Statistics to produce county level estimates in each state may vary.
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.