

Fact Sheet

Nearly 1 in 5 people in the United States live in rural areas. Rural residents tend to be older and are at higher risk for poor health outcomes than urban residents.

Office of Minority Health and Health Equity

What is rural health?

Rural health is the health of people living in rural areas, who generally are located farther from health care facilities and other services than people living in urban areas. More than 46 million people in the United States (15% of the population) live in rural areas. There are more older adults, people with disabilities, and veterans living in rural areas. Rural areas tend to have higher rates of people who do not have health insurance and who have limited access to health care services because many medical centers in rural areas are closing.



What are rural health disparities?

People living in rural areas are generally at higher risk of disease and death than people living in urban areas. These differences in risk are known as rural health disparities. Rural residents are at greater risk of death from:

- Heart disease
- Cancer
- Stroke
- Unintentional injury (for example: motor vehicle death, opioid overdose and other substance abuse)
- Chronic lower respiratory disease

Rural residents also are more likely to have multiple health conditions compared to people living in other areas.

Heart disease, stroke, hypertension, diabetes, and arthritis are examples of health conditions that are more common in rural areas.

Within rural areas, members of racial/ethnic minority, tribal, and other diverse groups are at higher risk for poor health outcomes. American Indian/Alaska Native, African American, and Hispanic/Latino adults living in rural areas reported higher rates of fair or poor health compared to non-Hispanic white adults. Rural African American and American Indian/Alaska Native adults are more likely to have multiple chronic health conditions than non-Hispanic white adults.

What causes rural health disparities?

Factors that put people living in rural areas at greater risk for poor health outcomes include:

- Less access to care because of fewer health care providers, medical facilities, and transportation options
- Exposures to specific environmental hazards, such as pollution and poor air and water quality
- Higher rates of cigarette smoking, high blood pressure, and obesity
- Less leisure-time physical activity
- Lower seatbelt use
- Food deserts, areas with fewer grocery options and lower availability of healthy foods
- Higher rates of poverty and less likelihood of having health insurance

Rural health and clinical trials

To find a health care provider in your area, visit findahealthcenter.hrsa.gov.

The FDA encourages diverse participation in clinical trials. If you think a clinical trial may be right for you, talk to your health care provider. You can also search for clinical trials in your area at www.clinicaltrials.gov.

For more information on health equity, visit www.fda.gov/healthequity.