

Understanding Urban and Rural Differences in Injury Data

NCDHHS Division of Public Health, [Injury and Violence Prevention Branch \(IVPB\)](#), Epidemiology, Surveillance, and Informatics (ESI) Unit

Data on Urban and Rural Geographies

Organizing counties or other areas into groups based on how urban or rural they are helps to understand differences in the risk of injuries based on where someone lives.



- Different environments pose different risks for injuries. For example:
 - Rural areas may have more machinery-related injuries based on the types of work people are doing, like farming.
 - Urban areas may have more pedestrian injuries, with more people living and commuting in the same areas.

Organizing Data into Urban and Rural Groups

There are many ways to group or classify how urban or rural places are within the state.

How geographic data are organized into urban and rural groups can depend on the goals of a project or analysis, and the type of data being used.

Different classification systems consider:

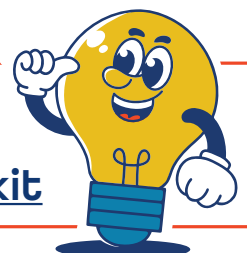
- What the data will be used for
 - Tracking public health outcomes across urban and rural areas
 - Understanding population trends and demographic differences
 - Informing health care access and funding allocation
 - Informing economic and infrastructure planning
 - Other public health activities
- If the project needs to align with national standards
- The level of the geographic area being used to create urban and rural groups (e.g. county, census tract, zip code)

Some sources used for urban and rural classification include:

- U.S. Census Bureau
- National Center for Health Statistics
- Office of Management and Budget
- NC Rural Economic Development Center
- NC Office of Rural Health

Source: NCDHHS Urban & Rural Classification Guidebook, 2025

FOR MORE RESOURCES:
Visit our [Injury Data Users Toolkit](#)



IVPB Urban and Rural Classification

IVPB has traditionally used the U.S. Census Bureau's classification system to organize counties into groups of **mostly urban**, **mostly rural**, or **completely rural**.

Mostly rural and completely rural are combined into a single category for rural counties.

Urban		Rural			
Mostly Urban		Mostly Rural			Completely Rural
Alamance	Hoke	Alexander	Halifax	Randolph	Alleghany
Brunswick	Iredell	Anson	Harnett	Robeson	Cherokee
Buncombe	Lee	Ashe	Haywood	Rockingham	Clay
Burke	Lenoir	Avery	Hertford	Rutherford	Gates
Cabarrus	Mecklenburg	Beaufort	Jackson	Sampson	Graham
Caldwell	Nash	Bertie	Johnston	Stanly	Greene
Carteret	New Hanover	Bladen	Lincoln	Stokes	Hyde
Catawba	Onslow	Camden	Macon	Surry	Jones
Craven	Orange	Caswell	Madison	Transylvania	Pamlico
Cumberland	Pasquotank	Chatham	Martin	Vance	Perquimans
Dare	Pitt	Chowan	McDowell	Washington	Swain
Davidson	Richmond	Cleveland	Mitchell	Watauga	Tyrrell
Durham	Rowan	Columbus	Montgomery	Wilkes	Warren
Edgecombe	Scotland	Currituck	Moore	Yadkin	Yancey
Forsyth	Union	Davie	Northampton		
Gaston	Wake	Duplin	Pender		
Guilford	Wayne	Franklin	Person		
Henderson	Wilson	Granville	Polk		

Geographic Levels Used to Classify Urban and Rural Injury Outcomes

The system IVPB currently uses assigns data to urban and rural groups based on the person's county of residence.

However, how urban or how rural an area is can vary greatly within a single county, and people living in the same county may have very different experiences based on where they live.

- IVPB is exploring using smaller geographic areas within counties, like census tracts, to classify injury outcomes within urban and rural settings.
- The U.S. Census system also allows data to be grouped at the census tract and block group levels.

WHERE CAN I FIND DATA ON URBAN AND RURAL INJURIES IN NC?

Data on injuries in urban and rural counties in NC are included in factsheets, power point slides, and other reports posted to the IVPB website.

To find resources with data on urban and rural differences in injuries in NC, visit the [IVPB Data Resource Inventory](#).

