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Population 65 Years and Older Varies by Region and Non-Metro Status in Mississippi: Implications for COVID-19

John J. Green, Ph.D.
Population Brief April 3, 2020



Much of the information available to date suggests that novel Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) is of particular concern for people in older age groups, given their increased likelihood of facing complications that could result in hospitalization and risk of death.¹ These patterns hold for Mississippi.² The age dimension may be of special concern for rural areas where testing is less frequent, where health infrastructures are underdeveloped, and where populations tend to be older and have more pre-existing chronic conditions than their more urbanized counterparts.³ It is noteworthy that some regions of the country, including the South, also have younger populations at considerable risk because of existing health challenges.⁴

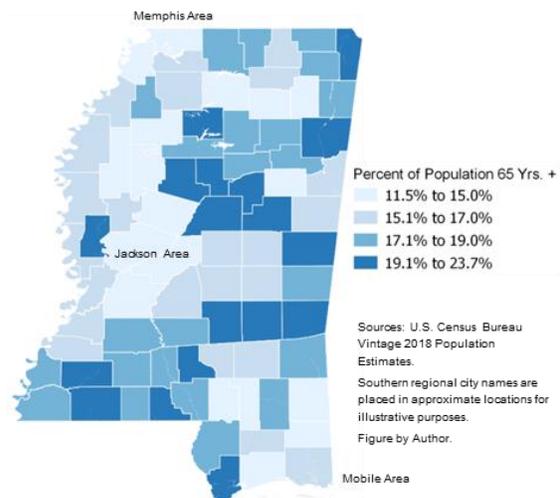
Although some places have lower testing rates than others, we do have public, reliable, and comparable data on the age of populations at various levels of geography. Such data may be useful to better understand the age characteristics of our state and counties to anticipate where there may be greater potential for COVID-19 complications and health and social system demands.

The U.S. Census Bureau provides data on population age, with sources including the Census (conducted every ten years) as well as official Population Estimates and the American Community Survey. The latter two sources provide new estimates on an annual basis. This *Population Brief* makes use of population estimates by age, focusing on the

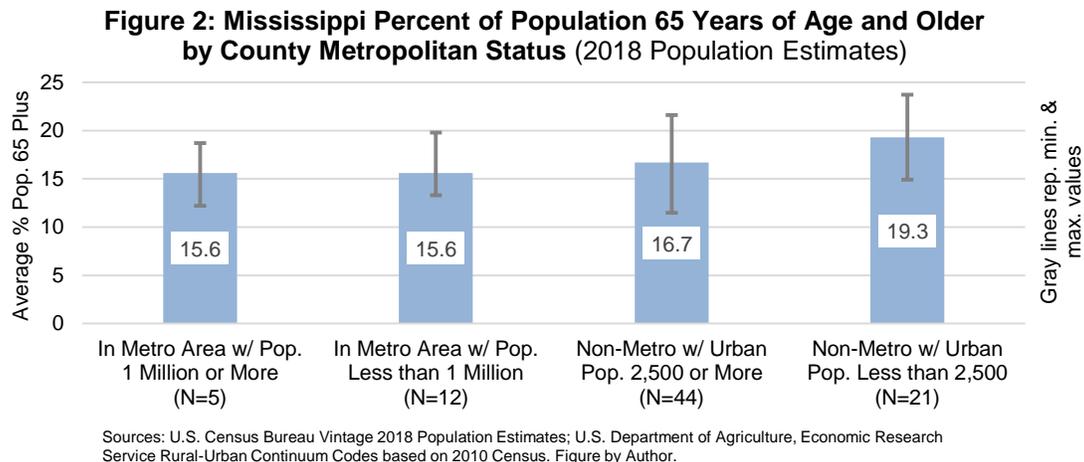
percent of the population 65 years of age and older.⁵ (Future *Population Briefs* will focus on other age groups and characteristics.)

- According to data from 2018 population estimates, 16.0 percent of the U.S. population was 65 years of age and older. Mississippi was similar at 15.9 percent.
- There was considerable variation between counties within the state (Figure 1).
 - The minimum percent of the population 65 years of age and older was 11.5 and the maximum was 23.7.
 - There was some regional clustering of counties with similar percentages.

Figure 1: Mississippi Percent of the Population 65 Years and Older by County (2018 Population Estimates)



- There was variation based on the metropolitan status of counties.⁶ Figure 2 shows the average percent of the population 65 years of age and older in counties across four categories. Non-metro counties had higher average percentages of their populations age 65 years and older than did metro counties.



As the data presented in this *Population Brief* suggest, there were differences in the percentage of the population 65 years of age and older across the state of Mississippi in 2018. These insights should be used to inform planning and monitoring for places where there might be additional health challenges and needs associated with COVID-19 and other health concerns.

The University of Mississippi Center for Population Studies (CPS) engages in outreach, education, and research to advance and apply knowledge to inform community development and promote health and wellbeing. The ideas expressed in this Population Brief are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the CPS as a whole or its partner organizations. For more information on the CPS, please visit <http://cps.olemiss.edu>.

¹Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. 2020. "People Who are at Higher Risk of Severe Illness." Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-2019). Accessed 4.2.2020 from:

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/need-extra-precautions/people-at-higher-risk.html>.

²Mississippi State Department of Health. 2020. "Current Cases and Statistics." Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-2019). Accessed 4.1.2020 from: https://msdh.ms.gov/msdhsite/_static/14,0,420.html#Mississippi.

³Monnat, Shannon. 2020. "Why Coronavirus Could Hit Rural Areas Harder." *Issue Brief 16*. Lerner Center for Public Health Promotion, Syracuse University. Available from:

<https://lernercenter.syr.edu/2020/03/24/why-coronavirus-could-hit-rural-areas-harder/>

⁴Koma, Wyatt, Tricia Neuman, Gary Claxton, Matthew Rae, Jennifer Kates, and Josh Michaud. 2020.

"How Many Adults Are at Risk of Serious Illness if Infected with Coronavirus? Updated Data." *Data Note*. Kaiser Family Foundation. Available from: <http://files.kff.org/attachment/Data-Note-How-Many-Adults-Are-at-Risk-of-Serious-Illness-If-Infected-with-Coronavirus.pdf>.

⁵At the time of this writing, Vintage 2019 Population Estimates were available, but not by age. This analysis makes use of 2018 estimates (<https://www.census.gov/data/datasets/time-series/demo/popest/2010s-counties-detail.html?#>) and will be updated when new data are available.

⁶U.S. Department of Agriculture, Economic Research Service Rural-Urban Continuum Codes. See: <https://www.ers.usda.gov/data-products/rural-urban-continuum-codes.aspx>.