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

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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. 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.

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5. At 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.