

Rural Hospitals Have Higher Percentages of Patients with COVID-19 than Urban Hospitals (October-December 2020)

Since the onset of COVID-19, public health leaders have emphasized reducing the rate of viral spread to ensure that hospitals did not become overwhelmed. On December 15, 2020, the [U.S. DHHS published weekly data](#) on each individual hospital's status on key indicators for acute management of COVID-19 patients. We analyzed these data to compare the percent of hospitalized patients with COVID-19 in rural versus urban hospitals.

Rural hospitals have a higher percentage of patients with COVID-19 than urban hospitals.

Figure 1 shows that, although it has been increasing in both urban and rural hospitals, the percentage of patients with COVID-19 has been four-to-six percentage points higher in rural hospitals since October.

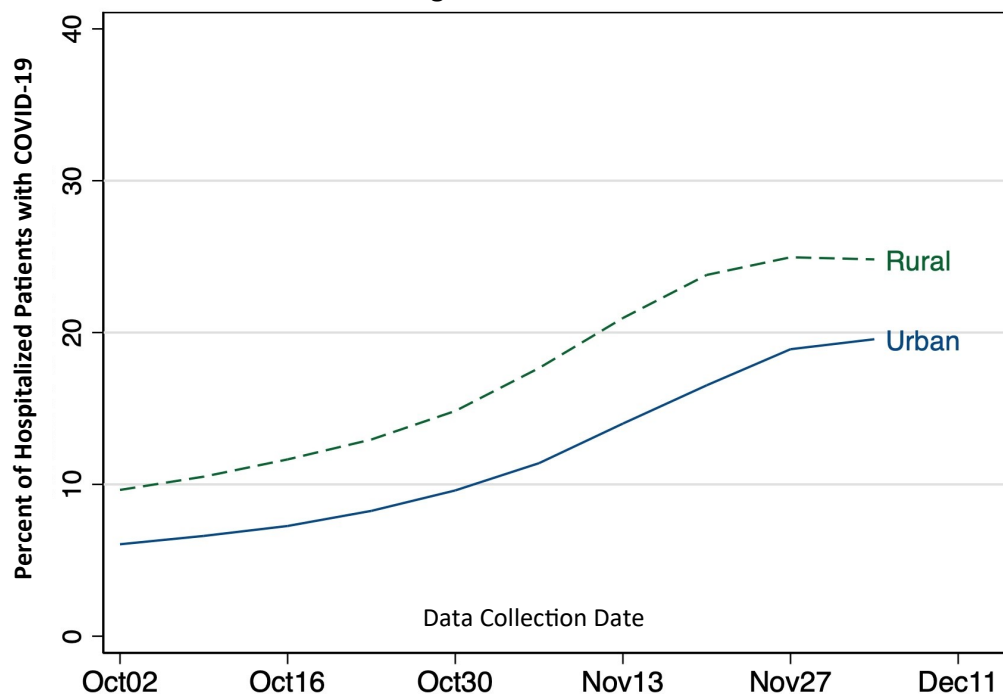
The percentage of hospitalized patients with COVID-19 is higher in rural hospitals than in urban hospitals in most Census regions.

The percentage of hospitalized patients with COVID-19 is higher in rural hospitals than in urban hospitals in the Midwest and South and about the same in the Northeast and West. Figures 2 and 5 show that the difference between rural and urban hospitals in the South have largely remained constant, and the difference in the Midwest grew considerably.

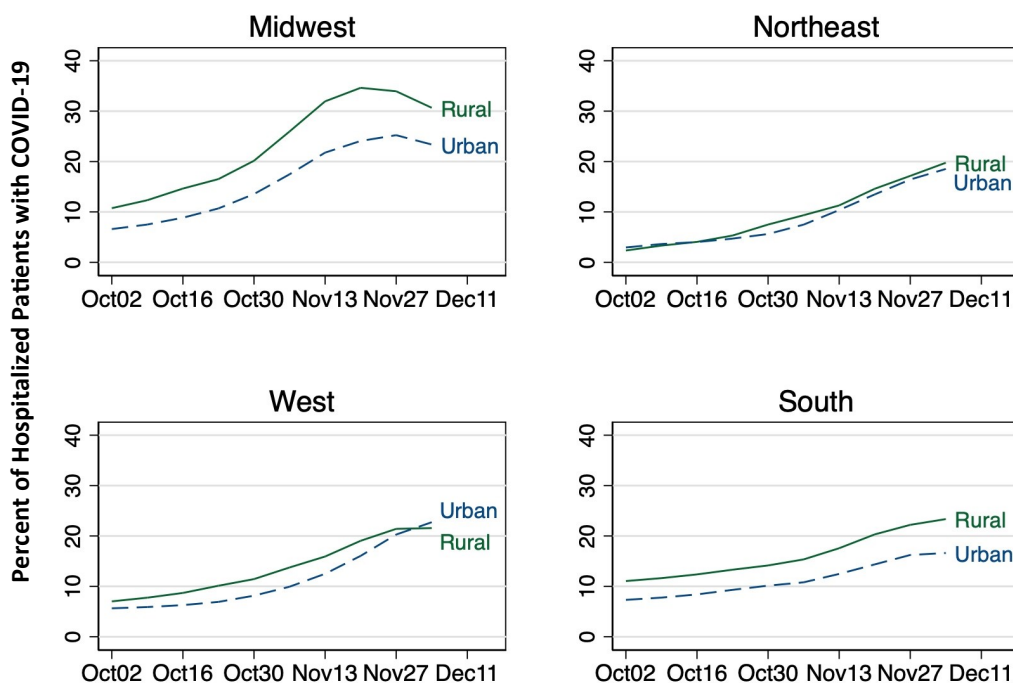
Methods: 1) [Rural definition](#).
2) Suppressed values were imputed with "2".

Percent of Hospitalized Patients with COVID-19 in Rural vs. Urban Hospitals

Figure 1. U.S. Total



Figures 2-5. Census Regions



Policy implications: A higher percent of hospitalized patients have COVID-19 in rural hospitals than in urban hospitals. Because staffing can be more difficult to maintain in rural hospitals, the higher exposure in rural hospitals may put their staffs – and the hospitals they work in – at greater risk to maintain peak care capacity.