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UNH Research Finds Rural Areas with Seasonal Homes Hit Hard by COVID-19

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(HTTPS://WWW.UNH.EDU/UNHTODAY/NEWS/2020/04/13/UNH-RESEARCH-FINDS-RURAL-AREAS-SEASONAL-HOMES-HIT-HARD-COVID-19)

DURHAM, N.H.— In a nationwide effort to get people to stay at home and not travel between states or to vacation homes, new research out of the University of New Hampshire finds rural counties across the United States with high numbers of seasonal homes saw higher rates of COVID-19 cases than either urban or other rural areas.

“These findings are consistent with anecdotal reports from popular vacation spots that were seeing an increase in visitors, including some who may have unknowingly been infected, that are leaving urban areas and trying socially distance at second homes and seasonal rental properties,” said Jessica Carson, research assistant professor at UNH’s Carsey School of Public Policy.

The study (<https://carsey.unh.edu/publication/snapshot/rural-areas-seasonal-homes-hit-hard-COVID>) found that in the nation’s 199 rural counties where seasonal housing accounts for 25 percent or more of all housing units, average cases per 100,000 people were more than twice as high as in other rural counties and 15 percent higher than in urban areas. While findings correlate to the trend of people heading to vacation homes, there are several possible explanations for the higher prevalence of cases in these areas, including differences in the level of COVID-19 testing and a higher median age.

“Rural America is older and these counties in particular can be popular retirement destinations, so folks may skew older there,” said Carson. “Relatedly, incomes may also be higher there, meaning people could be more likely to have health insurance and transportation to get tested, which could influence the likelihood of diagnosis and higher number of cases.”

Carson adds that these rural areas also offer a lot of beautiful natural amenities, like hiking, biking, rock climbing, and might draw foot traffic and increase the number of day visitors who may have unknowingly brought the virus into these places. Other studies support the fact that counties known for their recreational activities have a higher number of cases with coronavirus.



Some of the rural counties with high shares of seasonal housing include popular vacation spots in New England like Coos, Grafton, Carroll and Belknap in New Hampshire, Nantucket and Dukes Counties (which include Martha’s Vineyard and Nantucket islands) in Massachusetts and Lincoln and Oxford Counties in Maine.

The Carsey School of Public Policy is nationally recognized for research, policy education and bringing people together for thoughtful dialogue to address important societal challenges. The school develops and facilitates innovative, responsive and equitable solutions at all levels of government and in the for-profit and nonprofit sectors.

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