



Rural-Urban Differences in Midwifery Care During Childbirth in the US

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Key Findings

- The overall percentage of births from 2007-2022 that were midwife-attended was higher for rural (9.7%) compared to urban (9.4%) residents.
- Among midwife-attended births, most were attended by CNMs or CMs, but rural residents had a lower proportion of births supported by CNMs and CMs (87.7%) and a higher proportion supported by other midwives (12.3%) compared with urban residents (92.6% and 7.4%, respectively).
- There were rural-urban differences in midwife-attended births in different settings. A higher proportion of midwife-attended births occurred at home for rural residents (10.7%) compared with urban residents (6.2%), and a lower proportion of midwife-attended births occurred in hospitals for rural residents (84.2%) compared to urban residents (89.4%).
- Midwife-attended births increased over time for both rural and urban residents. The proportions of births that were midwife-attended increased from 8.3% and 7.8% in 2007 to 12.7% and 12.0% in 2022 for rural and urban residents, respectively.

Purpose

This infographic provides a snapshot of rural-urban differences in midwife-attended births, including changes over time as access to rural obstetric care declined and severe maternal morbidity and mortality rose across the United States. We used publicly available natality data from CDC WONDER (2007-2022) to document rural-urban differences in the percentage of births attended by midwives (by Certified Nurse Midwives (CNM)/Certified Midwives (CM) or by other midwives), generally and by location of childbirth (hospital, freestanding birth center, home, or other) over time.

Overview

Rural obstetric unit closures and health care workforce shortages limit access to care for pregnant rural residents. Midwives attend a growing portion of births nationally, and our data indicate that this was true for both rural and urban US residents from 2007-2022 (see figure). We found that the percentage of births that were midwife-attended did not differ substantively for rural and urban residents during this time. Still, there were some rural-urban differences in midwife-attended births across birth settings, with more midwife-attended births occurring at home for rural residents compared with urban residents. These differences have implications for access to midwifery care for rural and urban residents and may indicate a need for workforce policies and midwifery-related regulations and laws to account for rural-urban differences in access to and outcomes of childbirth care.

Suggested Citation

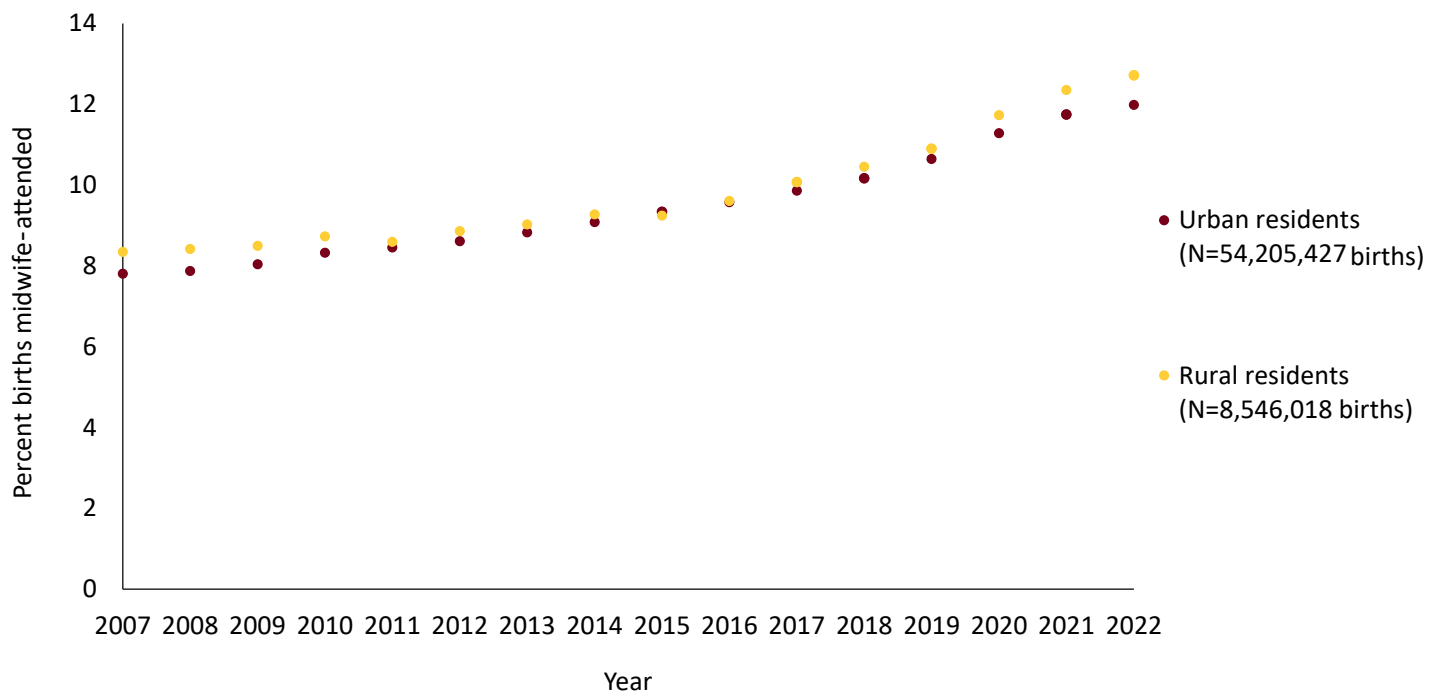
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Characteristics of midwife-attended births by birth setting for rural and urban US residents, 2007-2022

	Rural US residents (n=8,546,018 births)	Urban US residents (n=54,205,427 births)
Of all births		
N (%) midwife-attended	831,523 (9.7)	5,105,449 (9.4)
Of all midwife-attended births		
N (%) by CNM/CM	729,035 (87.7)	4,728,700 (92.6)
N (%) by other midwife	102,488 (12.3)	376,749 (7.4)
Of all midwife-attended births		
N (%) hospital-based births	700,149 (84.2)	4,561,760 (89.4)
N (%) birth center births	35,362 (4.3)	219,487 (4.3)
N (%) home births	89,367 (10.7)	316,810 (6.2)
N (%) births in other locations (clinic/doctor's office; other; unknown/not stated)	6,645 (0.8)	7,392 (0.1)

CNM, Certified Nurse Midwife; CM, Certified Midwife; US, United States
All comparisons were found to be statistically significant ($p < 0.001$) using chi-square tests.

Changes over time in the percent of midwife-attended births for rural and urban US residents, 2007-2022



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