NCHS Urban-Rural Classification Scheme for Counties Data File Documentation

The National Center for Health Statistics (NCHS) has developed a six-level urban-rural classification scheme for U.S. counties and other jurisdictions that are the equivalent of counties in their area. NCHS has updated the scheme using the [2023 Office of Management and Budget (OMB) delineation of metropolitan and micropolitan statistical areas](#) and Census population information to classify U.S. counties and county equivalents into four metropolitan and two nonmetropolitan categories.

This is the fourth version of the NCHS Urban-Rural Classification Scheme, following releases of the 2013, 2006, and 1990 (released in 2001) schemes. The basic framework of the four schemes is the same. NCHS used the same classification rules to assign counties to the six urban-rural categories in the 2023, 2013 and 2006 schemes. Somewhat different classification rules were used for the 1990 census-based scheme.

These data files contain the 2023, 2013, 2006, and 1990 NCHS Urban-Rural Classification Scheme for Counties codes for every county and county equivalent in the United States, but do not include U.S. territories.

- The 2023 NCHS scheme is based on OMB's [July 2023 delineations](#) of metropolitan statistical areas (MSA) and micropolitan statistical areas (derived using the 2020 OMB standards for defining MSAs and micropolitan statistical areas) and the [2022 postcensal estimates](#) of the resident U.S. population.
- The 2013 NCHS scheme is based on OMB's [February 2013 delineation of MSAs and micropolitan statistical areas](#) (derived using the 2010 OMB standards for defining MSAs and micropolitan statistical areas) and the [2012 postcensal estimates](#) of the resident U.S. population.
- The 2006 NCHS scheme is based on OMB's [December 2005 delineation of MSAs and micropolitan statistical areas](#) (derived according the 2000 OMB standards for defining MSAs and micropolitan statistical areas) and the [2004 postcensal estimates](#) of the resident U.S. population.
- The 1990 NCHS scheme is based on OMB's [June 1993 delineation of MSAs](#) (derived according to the 1990 OMB standards for defining MSAs) and [1990 census data](#).

A description of the 2013 scheme and its development can be found in Ingram DD, Franco SF. 2013 NCHS Urban-Rural Classification Scheme for Counties. National Center for Health Statistics. Vital Health Stat 2(166). 2014 (available for download from the NCHS Urban-Rural Classification Scheme for Counties web page at https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data_access/urban_rural.htm).

A description of the 2006 and 1990 census-based schemes and their development can be found in Ingram DD, Franco SF. NCHS Urban-Rural Classification Scheme for Counties. National Center for Health Statistics. Vital Health Stat 2(154). 2012 (available for download from the NCHS Urban-Rural Classification Scheme for Counties web page at https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data_access/urban_rural.htm).

Categories of the NCHS Urban-Rural Classification Scheme for Counties

The 2023, 2013, 2006, and 1990 census-based NCHS schemes have six levels, four for metropolitan counties and two for nonmetropolitan counties.

Table 1. Categories of the 2023, 2013, and 2006 NCHS Urban-Rural Classification Scheme for Counties

Category code	Category name	Category description
Metropolitan counties		
1	Large central metro	Counties in metropolitan areas of 1 million or more population where:

		• The county contains the entire population of the largest principal city of the metropolitan area, or • The county is entirely contained in the largest principal city of the metropolitan area, or • The county contains at least 250,000 residents of any principal city in the metropolitan area
2	Large fringe metro	Counties in metropolitan areas of 1 million or more population that do not qualify as large central
3	Medium metro	Counties in metropolitan areas of 250,000 to 999,999 population
4	Small metro	Counties in metropolitan areas of 50,000 to 249,999 population
Nonmetropolitan counties		
5	Micropolitan	Counties in micropolitan statistical areas
6	Noncore	Counties that did not qualify as micropolitan

Notes: The 2006 and 2013 schemes included a discriminant analysis to confirm the classification of counties as large central or large fringe, which demonstrated the robustness of the classification scheme as only a handful of county assignments were changed based on the analysis. For the 2023 scheme, county assignments are based only on the classification rules.

Table 2. Categories of the 1990 census-based NCHS Urban-Rural Classification Scheme for Counties

Category code	Category name	Category description
Metropolitan counties		
1	Large central metro	Counties in metropolitan areas of 1 million or more population that contain all or part of the largest central city of the metropolitan area
2	Large fringe metro	Counties in metropolitan areas of 1 million or more population that so not qualify as large central or counties in primary metropolitan statistical areas (PMSA) of less than 1 million that have at least one county adjacent to a large central metro county in another PMSA
3	Medium metro	Counties in metropolitan areas of 250,000 to 999,999 population
4	Small metro	Counties in metropolitan areas of 50,000 to 249,999 population
Nonmetropolitan counties		
5	Counties with a city of 10,000 or more	Counties with a city of 10,000 or more population
6	Counties without a city of 10,000 or more population	Counties without a city of 10,000 or more population

Control totals for data files

Table 3. Number of counties/county-equivalent entities in each category of the 2023, 2013, 2006, and 1990 census-based NCHS Urban-Rural Classification Scheme for Counties

Category code	Category name	Number of counites/county-equivalent entities			
		2023 scheme	2013 scheme	2006 scheme	1990 census-based scheme
Metropolitan					
1	Large central metro	67	68	63	63
2	Large fringe metro	368	368	354	250
3	Medium metro	395	373	332	321
4	Small metro	356	358	341	204
Nonmetropolitan					
5	Micropolitan	658	641	694	483
6	Noncore	1,300	1,335	1,358	1,821
	Total valid counties	3,144	3,143	3,142	3,142
	Missing counties	16	17	18	18
Total	All categories	3,160	3,160	3,160	3,160

Note: The new counties in 2023 are Chugach Census Area, AK; Copper River Census Area, AK; Capitol Planning Region, CT; Greater Bridgeport Planning Region, CT; Lower Connecticut River Valley Planning Region, CT; Naugatuck Valley Planning Region, CT; Northeastern Connecticut Planning Region, CT; Northwest Hills Planning Region, CT; South Central Connecticut Planning Region, CT; Southeastern Connecticut Planning Region, CT; Western Connecticut Planning Region, CT. See "County Geography" document for more detail about county geography on the file.

Layout for CSV and SAS data files

File name: NCHSurbruralcodes
Number of records: 3,160
Release date: January 2025

Variable name	Item and Code Outline	Format
STFIPS	State FIPS code	Numeric
CTYFIPS	County FIPS code	Numeric
ST_ABBREV	State abbreviation	Character
CTYNAME	County name	Character
CBSATITLE	CBSA title (July 2023 OMB delineation) Missing for noncore and invalid counties	Character
CBSAPOP	CBSA July 1 resident population (Vintage 2022 postcensal series) Missing for noncore and invalid counties	Numeric
CTYPOP	County July 1 resident population (Vintage 2022 postcensal series) Missing for invalid counties	Numeric
CODE2023	2023 NCHS urban-rural scheme code 1 = Large central metro 2 = Large fringe metro 3 = Medium metro 4 = Small metro 5 = Micropolitan (nonmetropolitan) 6 = Noncore (nonmetropolitan) Missing for invalid counties	Numeric
CODE2013	2013 NCHS urban-rural scheme code 1 = Large central metro 2 = Large fringe metro 3 = Medium metro 4 = Small metro 5 = Micropolitan (nonmetropolitan) 6 = Noncore (nonmetropolitan) Missing for invalid counties	Numeric
CODE2006	2006 NCHS urban-rural scheme code 1 = Large central metro 2 = Large fringe metro 3 = Medium metro 4 = Small metro	Numeric

5 = Micropolitan (nonmetropolitan)
6 = Noncore (nonmetropolitan)
Missing for invalid counties

CODE1990 <u>1990 NCHS urban-rural scheme code</u> Numeric
1 = Large central metro
2 = Large fringe metro
3 = Medium metro
4 = Small metro
5 = Micropolitan (nonmetropolitan)
6 = Without a city of 10,000 or more
(nonmetropolitan)
Missing for invalid counties