



NEWS DESERTS ARE A THREAT TO PUBLIC HEALTH



NEWS DESERTS ARE A THREAT TO PUBLIC HEALTH – VACCINATION RATES LAG DRAMATICALLY BEHIND NATIONAL AND STATE AVERAGES IN COMMUNITIES WITH LIMITED TO NO LOCAL JOURNALISM

For years, we have known that “[news deserts](#)”—communities with only one and sometimes zero local daily or weekly newspapers—are bad for democracy. As the country struggles to manage what has become a “[pandemic of the unvaccinated](#),” the data seems clear: news deserts are also terrible for public health.

As the pandemic forced millions into their homes in March 2020, Americans were hungry for news, triggering a [massive surge in traffic](#) to news websites. Everything was uncertain in those early weeks and Americans had many questions: [How exactly does the COVID-19 virus spread?](#) [Is the virus in my town yet?](#) [Should we be afraid of runners?](#) [Can I go to choir practice tonight?](#) [Are my pets safe?](#) [Should we wear masks?](#) [Is it safe to go to work, school, church, or a restaurant?](#) [How about the beach or grocery stores?](#) [Will my son or daughter return to college after spring break ends?](#) [How can essential workers stay safe?](#) [What exactly does a lock down order mean in my state, county, or city?](#) [Do I need to wear gloves when touching the mail or a newspaper?](#)

While national publications proved to be essential, the pandemic also demonstrated the incredible value of local newspapers, the only publications positioned to answer many of our most practical questions—[Can I open my business tomorrow morning?](#) [How will distance learning work?](#) [How do I get a school-issued device for my child?](#) [How do I apply for unemployment?](#)

As the pandemic progressed, our collective understanding of the virus has grown, as have our questions. Today, from the [impact of the Delta variant](#) and [vaccine hesitancy](#) on local hospitals to [debates over masks in schools](#) and [vaccine mandates](#), journalists working for local newspapers are busy breaking [vitaly important COVID news](#).

Unfortunately, in the hundreds of “[news deserts](#)” across the United States there is no one to tell these vitally important stories. Since 2004, [1,800 newspapers](#)—roughly [a quarter of the country’s newspapers](#)—have disappeared. Denied the ability by Google and Facebook to [fairly compete for digital advertising dollars](#) or [obtain fair compensation](#) for their journalism, many of the papers that have survived have been reduced to [hollowed-out shells operating with a skeleton staff](#). The rise of news deserts isn’t just bad for the journalism industry, [it’s bad for democracy](#). News deserts have [lower voter turnout](#), [fewer contested elections](#), and [more polarized](#) local politics. They are also [poorer, older, and less educated](#). When corruption happens in a news desert, it can [take years for anyone to find out](#).

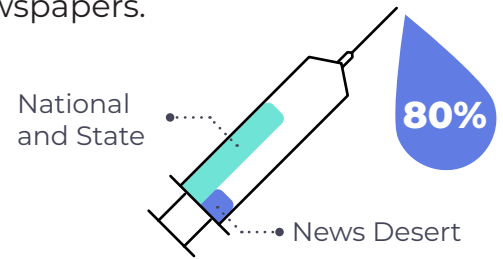
We can now add **public health** to the list of things that are harmed by America’s news desert problem. Comparing vaccination rates, as [compiled by The New York Times](#), to



America's news deserts as identified by the nation's foremost expert on news deserts, Penelope Muse Abernathy, the Knight Chair in Journalism and Digital Media Economics at the University of North Carolina's Hussman School of Journalism and Media, Save Journalism has uncovered a startling—if not unsurprising—correlation between a county's vaccination rates and resident's access to local newspapers.

In 80% of News Desert Counties, vaccination rates lag behind national and state averages.

- **80% of News Desert counties fall behind** their state's overall percentage rate for fully vaccinated adults.
- **84% fall below** the national average for fully vaccinated adults (63%).
- **85% fall below** the national average for fully vaccinated residents age 12 and older (60%).



States with few or no news desert counties are among the most successful in terms of vaccinating eligible residents.

The ten states with the fewest news deserts are all at or above the national average for fully vaccinated adults (63%).

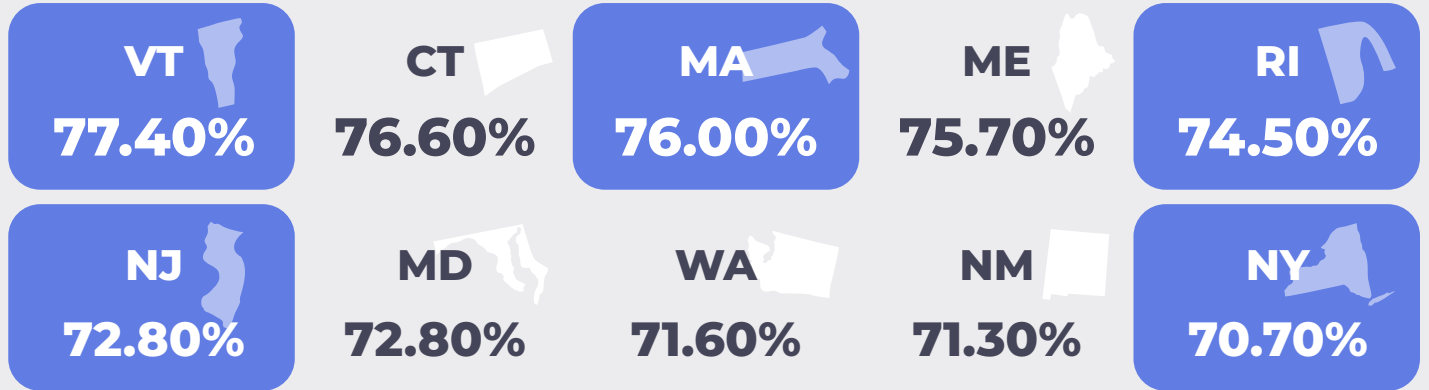
TEN STATES WITH FEWEST NEWS DESERTS

	VAX % FOR ADULTS	# OF COUNTIES WITH ZERO NEWSPAPERS	# OF NEWS DESERT COUNTIES (1 OR NO NEWSPAPER)	% OF COUNTIES THAT ARE NEWS DESERTS
National	63%	225	1,528	58.3%
DC	67.10%	0	0	0
DE	65.20%	0	0	0
IA	62.90%	0	17	17.17
MA	76.00%	0	2	14
MN	67.20%	0	8	9
NH	69.20%	0	2	20
NJ	72.80%	0	2	9.5
NY	70.70%	1	13	22.58
RI	74.50%	0	0	0
VT	77.40%	1	2	21.42

VAX % FOR ADULTS*: Data from The New York Times as of Aug. 25, 2021.



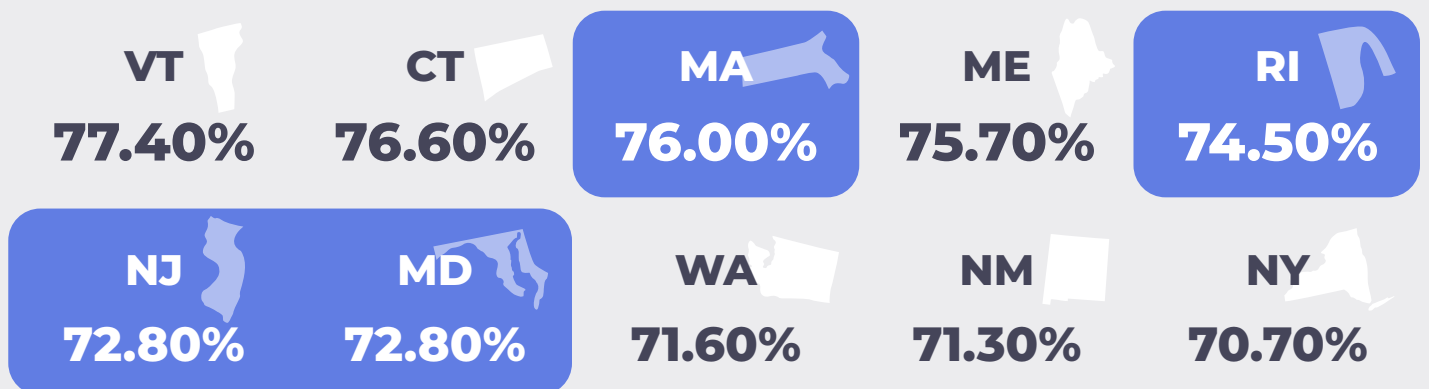
Five of the ten states with the fewest newspapers are among the ten most vaccinated states.



The three jurisdictions without *any* news deserts all have **above-average vaccination rates: Delaware (65%), Rhode Island (76%), and Washington, D.C. (67%).**

	VAX % FOR ADULTS	# OF COUNTIES WITH ZERO NEWSPAPERS	# OF NEWS DESERT COUNTIES (1 OR NO NEWSPAPER)	% OF COUNTIES THAT ARE NEWS DESERTS
RI	74.50%	0	0	0
DC	67.10%	0	0	0
DE	65.20%	0	0	0

Four of the top **ten most vaccinated states--Massachusetts, Rhode Island, New Jersey, and Maryland--**has at least one daily or weekly newspaper in every county.





Many of the states with the worst vaccination rates are also the states with the most news deserts.

Of the ten states with the most news deserts, only one—New Mexico—has vaccination rates above the national average and four currently rank in the bottom ten states for fully vaccinated adults.

MOST NEWS DESERTS

	VAX % FOR ADULTS	% OF COUNTIES THAT ARE NEWS DESERTS.
AK	58.10%	86.67
ID	51.50%	81.8
GA	50.50%	81.13
UT	61.00%	79.3
MS	46.30%	79.2
NM	71.30%	78.78
KY	58.50%	78.3
WV	47.40%	78.18
NV	57.50%	76.4
TN	50.50%	75.78

TEN LEAST VACCINATED

	VAX % FOR ADULTS	% OF COUNTIES THAT ARE NEWS DESERTS.
AL	45.40%	56.7
MS	46.30%	79.2
WV	47.40%	78.18
WY	47.50%	34.78
AR	49.50%	62.67
LA	50.30%	64
TN	50.50%	75.78
GA	50.50%	81.13
ID	51.50%	81.8
ND	51.80%	54.71

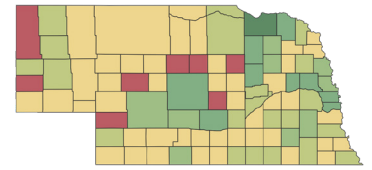


18 of the 25 states (red below) in which more than half of the counties are considered “news deserts” are also in the bottom half of states for fully vaccinated adults. Only 5 of the 25 states surpass the national average with respect to the percentage of adults that have been fully vaccinated.

	VAX % FOR ADULTS	% OF COUNTIES THAT ARE NEWS DESERTS.		VAX % FOR ADULTS	% OF COUNTIES THAT ARE NEWS DESERTS.
AL	45.40%	56.7	NC	55.20%	64
MS	46.30%	79.2	MT	55.40%	67.85
WV	47.40%	78.18	IN	56.60%	44.56
WY	47.50%	34.78	AZ	57.40%	40
AR	49.50%	62.67	NV	57.50%	76.4
LA	50.30%	64	TX	57.50%	61
GA	50.50%	81.13	AK	58.10%	86.67
TN	50.50%	75.78	OH	58.40%	43.18
ID	51.50%	81.8	KY	58.50%	78.3
ND	51.80%	54.71	KS	59.00%	56.19
SC	51.90%	52.17	MI	60.50%	55.42
OK	53.30%	45.45	IL	60.70%	29.4
MO	54.10%	48.2			



SIMILAR COUNTIES, DIFFERENT STORIES



Nebraska's News Landscape

Knox County, NE vs. Keith County, NE

KNOX COUNTY

(6 weekly newspapers)

KEITH COUNTY

(1 weekly newspaper)

8,391

(2020 Census)



POPULATION

8,335

(2020 Census)

84.7%



WHITE

88.9%

92.1%



HIGH SCHOOL
DIPLOMA

91.5%

21.6%



BA

20.5%

\$52,332



MEDIAN
INCOME

\$50,735

53% of adults are fully vaccinated;

49% of residents 12 and older are fully vaccinated
[we should note that all vaccination data is from NY Times COVID Vaccine maps, as of August 25, 2021]



VACCINATED

35% of adults are fully vaccinated;

33% of residents 12 and older are fully vaccinated



Sarasota County, FL vs. St. Lucie County, Florida

SARASOTA COUNTY, FL

(3 daily newspapers; 4 weekly newspapers)

ST. LUCIE COUNTY, FL

(0 daily or weekly newspapers)

434,006

([2020 Census](#))



POPULATION

329,226

([2020 Census](#))

37.3%



65+

24.7%

91.9%



COMPUTER

91.6%

84.7%



INTERNET

85.1%

\$62,236



MEDIAN
INCOME

\$52,322

66% of adults are fully vaccinated;
64% of residents 12 and older are fully vaccinated



VACCINATED

53% of adults are fully vaccinated;
51% of residents 12 and older are fully vaccinated



FIVE SMALLEST COUNTIES IN LOUISIANA

Cameron Parish, LA

Of the five smallest parishes in Louisiana, Cameron Parish stands out for its dramatically low vaccination rates.



POPULATION



VACCINATED

TENSAS PARISH, LOUISIANA

([1 weekly newspaper](#))

4,147

56% of adults are fully vaccinated; 52% of residents 12 and older are fully vaccinated

CAMERON PARISH, LA

([0 daily or weekly newspapers](#))

5,617

Only 17% of adults are fully vaccinated and 16% of residents 12 and older are fully vaccinated

EAST CARROLL PARISH, LOUISIANA

([1 weekly newspaper](#))

7,459

42% of adults are fully vaccinated; 40% of residents 12 and older are fully vaccinated

RED RIVER PARISH, LOUISIANA

([1 weekly newspaper](#))

7,620

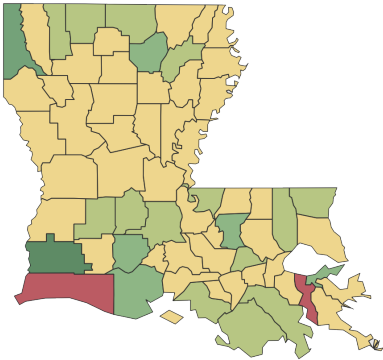
32% of adults are fully vaccinated; 30% of residents 12 and older are fully vaccinated

CATAHOULA PARISH, LOUISIANA

([1 weekly newspaper](#))

8,906

35% of adults are fully vaccinated; 33% of residents 12 and older are fully vaccinated



Louisiana's News Landscape

Cameron Parish, which is situated on the Louisiana/Texas border, also has much lower vaccination rates than every neighboring Louisiana parish and Texas county.



POPULATION



VACCINATED

CAMERON PARISH, LA
([0 daily or weekly newspapers](#))

5,617

Only 17% of adults are fully vaccinated and 16% of residents 12 and older are fully vaccinated

JEFFERSON DAVIS PARISH, LOUISIANA ([1 weekly newspaper](#))

32,250

33% of adults are fully vaccinated; 31% of residents 12 and older are fully vaccinated

VERMILION PARISH, LOUISIANA ([1 daily and 2 weekly newspapers](#))

57,359

35% of adults are fully vaccinated; 32% of residents 12 and older are fully vaccinated

CALCASIEU PARISH, LOUISIANA ([1 daily and 4 weekly newspapers](#))

216,785

40% of adults are fully vaccinated; 37% of residents 12 and older are fully vaccinated

JEFFERSON COUNTY, TEXAS
([2 daily newspapers](#))

256,526

43% of residents 12 and older are fully vaccinated

ORANGE COUNTY, TEXAS
([2 weekly newspaper](#))

84,808

31% of adults are fully vaccinated; 33% of residents 12 and older are fully vaccinated



APPENDIX



VACCINATION RATES IN COUNTIES WITH ZERO NEWSPAPERS

Vaccination data from The New York Times as of Aug. 25, 2021; news desert data from Penelope Muse Abernathy, Knight Chair in Journalism and Digital Media Economics at the University of North Carolina's Hussman School of Journalism and Media; demographic data from U.S. Census.

County, State	State	Local Newspapers	Vaccination Rate (12+ Y.O.) ²	Vaccination Rate (Adult)	Population
Aleutians West Census Area, AK	AK	0	56%	57%	5,634
Denali Borough, AK	AK	0	50	51%	2,097
Dillingham Census Area, AK	AK	0	51	52%	4,916
Prince of Wales-Hyder Census Area, AK	AK	0	54%	55%	6,203
Autauga County, AL	AL	0	33	35%	55,869
Conecuh County, AL	AL	0	35	37%	12,067
Sutter County, CA	CA	0	53	56%	96,971
Baca County, CO	CO	0	39	41%	3,581
Cheyenne County, CO	CO	0	29	32%	1,831
Costilla County, CO	CO	0	59	62%	3,887
Tolland County, CT	CT	0		56%	150,721
Calhoun County, FL	FL	0	30	32%	14,105
Dixie County, FL	FL	0	28	30%	16,826
Hernando County, FL	FL	0	48	50%	193,920
Martin County, FL	FL	0	58	60%	161,000
St. Lucie County, FL	FL	0	51	53%	471,826
Union County, FL	FL	0	29	30%	15,237
Camas County, ID	ID	0	no data	41%	1,106
Clark County, ID	ID	0	no data	38%	845
Fremont County, ID	ID	0	no data	44%	13,099
Gooding County, ID	ID	0	no data	41%	15,179
Jerome County, ID	ID	0	no data	43%	24,412
Lincoln County, ID	ID	0	no data	39%	5,366
Minidoka, ID	ID	0	no data	39%	21,039
Hamilton County, IL	IL	0	33	36%	8,116



County, State	State	Local Newspapers	Vaccination Rate (12+ Y.O.) ²	Vaccination Rate (Adult)	Population
Pulaski County, IL	IL	0	32	35%	5,335
Crawford County, IN	IN	0	36	38%	10,577
Elk County, KS	KS	0	31	34%	2,530
Menifee, KY	KY	0	40	42%	6,489
Robertson County, KY	KY	0	37	38%	2,108
Cameron Parish, LA	LA	0	16	17%	6,973
Somerset County, ME	ME	0	56	59%	50,484
Keeweenaw County, MI	MI	0	53	55%	2,116
Missaukee County, MI	MI	0	47	50%	15,118
Oscoda County, MI	MI	0	41	44%	8,241
Perry County, MO	MO	0	36	39%	19,136
Schuyler County, MO	MO	0	27	29%	4,660
Issaquena County, MS	MS	0	31	32%	1,327
Golden Valley County, MT	MT	0	42	45%	821
Petroleum County, MT	MT	0	30	32%	487
Treasure County, MT	MT	0	44	47%	696
Camden County, NC	NC	0	37	40%	10,867
Currituck County, NC	NC	0	46	49%	27,763
Gates County, NC	NC	0	41	44%	11,562
Jones County, NC	NC	0	44	46%	9,419
Northampton County, NC	NC	0	41	43%	19,483
Sioux County, ND	ND	0	40	43%	4,230
Slope County, ND	ND	0	11	11%	750
Banner County, NE	NE	0	27	28%	745
Blaine County, NE	NE	0	23	24%	465
Loup County, NE	NE	0	26	27%	664
McPherson County, NE	NE	0	11	13%	35,099
Perkins County, NE	NE	0	38	42%	2,891
Sherman County, NE	NE	0	39	41%	3,001
Sioux County, NE	NE	0	23	24%	1,166
Wheeler County, NE	NE	0	27	29%	783
Catron County, NM	NM	0	30	31%	3,527
Colfax County, NM	NM	0	41	42%	11,941



County, State	State	Local Newspapers	Vaccination Rate (12+ Y.O.) ²	Vaccination Rate (Adult)	Population
Harding County, NM	NM	0	37	36%	625
Mora County, NM	NM	0	47	47%	4,521
Esmeralda County, NV	NV	0	37	38%	873
Orleans County, NY	NY	0	51	53%	40,352
Harmon County, OK	OK	0	45	48%	2,653
Harper County, OK	OK	0	43	46%	3,688
Mayes County, OK	OK	0	37	40%	41,100
Roger Mills County, OK	OK	0	32	36%	3,583
Sherman County, OR	OR	0	53	56%	1,780
Wheeler County, OR	OR	0	52	54%	1,332
Union County, PA	PA	0	55	57%	44,923
Hancock County, TN	TN	0	29	31%	6,620
Houston County, TN	TN	0	35	38%	8,201
Polk County, TN	TN	0	37	40%	51,353
Beaver County, UT	UT	0	43	49%	6,710
Garfield County, UT	UT	0	51	56%	5,051
Piute County, UT	UT	0	34	39%	1,479
Rich County, UT	UT	0	45	50%	2,483
Wayne County, UT	UT	0	49	54%	2,711
Asotin County, WA	WA	0	38	40%	22,582
Hyde County, NC	NC	0	60	62%	4,937
Allendale County, SC	SC	0	50	53%	8,688
Van Buren County, TN	TN	0	49	52%	5,872
Daggett County, UT	UT	0	54	61%	950
Cochran County, TX	TX	0	38	no data	2,853
Collingsworth County, TX	TX	0	31	no data	2,920
Crosby County, TX	TX	0	42	no data	5,737
Duval County, TX	TX	0	57	no data	11,157
Glasscock County, TX	TX	0	39	no data	1,409
Hall County, TX	TX	0	41	no data	2,964
Hartley County, TX	TX	0	44	no data	5,576
Irion County, TX	TX	0	38	no data	1,536
Kenedy County, TX	TX	0	54	no data	404
Kent County, TX	TX	0	34	no data	762



County, State	State	Local Newspapers	Vaccination Rate (12+ Y.O.)2	Vaccination Rate (Adult)	Population
King County, TX	TX	0	17	no data	272
Kinney County, TX	TX	0	38	no data	3,667
La Salle County, TX	TX	0	60	no data	49,859
Loving County, TX	TX	0	22	no data	169
Maverick County, TX	TX	0	69	no data	5,771
McMullen County, TX	TX	0	42	no data	58,722
Mottley County, TX	TX	0	24	no data	1,200
Real County, TX	TX	0	43	no data	3,452
Refugio County, TX	TX	0	50	no data	6,948
Sterling County, TX	TX	0	34	no data	1,291
Terrell County, TX	TX	0	48	no data	776
Upton County, TX	TX	0	38	no data	3,657
Aleutians East Borough, AK	AK	0	70%	69%	3,337
Bethel Census Area, AK	AK	0	70	74%	18,386
Hoonah-Angoon Census Area	AK	0	71%	70%	
Kusilvak Census Area, AK	AK	0		80%	8,314
Lake and Peninsula Borough	AK	0	61%	63%	
Skagway, AK	AK	0	72%	71%	1,183
Yakutat, AK	AK	0	76%	77%	
Yukon-Koyukuk Census Area, AK	AK	0	72	73%	5,230
Kenton, KY	KY	0	62	65%	166,998
Jefferson Parish, LA	LA	0	61	63%	432,493
Menominee County, MI	MI	0	66	70%	22,780
Montour County, PA	PA	0	76	79%	18,230
Buffalo County, SD	SD	0	61	66%	1,962
Oglala Lakota County, SD	SD	0	64	66%	14,177
Stanley County, SD	SD	0	59	63%	3,098
Menominee County, WI	WI	0	70	73%	4,556



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