

OneFAB

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Introduction

While home births have increased across the United States over the past 10 years, most babies today are born in a hospital.¹ Giving birth in a hospital setting can allow for the quickest response if the mother or baby is high risk or faces serious complications during or after delivery. For the same reason, proximity to a hospital for those giving birth at home can be an important consideration.²

From 2010-2022, the United States saw a net loss of 399 maternity care units, which includes the care for women throughout their pregnancy, during childbirth and postpartum. Labor and delivery units can pose financial challenges for hospitals due to a combination of factors, such as staffing shortages, declining birth rates, and low reimbursement for Medicaid services.³ For those who gave birth in Michigan in 2023, KFF (a health policy research, polling, and journalism organization) reported that Medicaid covered 37% of the annual costs.⁴

In line with the national trend, Michigan experienced the closure of at least 11 labor and delivery units since 2010 (see Table 1 for the location and year of closure). Of the birthing hospitals that closed, nine facilities were in counties that are considered “rural” (highlighted in Table 1).

According to the 2020 United States Census, an area is designated as rural if it falls outside of the definition of urban, i.e., an area that comprises a densely settled core of census blocks that meet minimum housing unit density and/or population density requirements of at least 2,000 housing units, or a population of at least 5,000.⁵

Maternity Care Deserts

A maternity care desert is defined by March of Dimes as a county with zero hospitals or birth centers offering obstetric care, and zero obstetric providers. As of 2024, 21.7% of Michigan counties were considered maternity care deserts, up from 18% in 2023.⁶ The Upper Peninsula counties of Keweenaw, Ontonagon, Baraga, Iron, Alger and Luce are considered maternity care deserts. The northern Michigan counties affected are Cheboygan, Presque Isle, Antrim, Oscoda, Alcona, Missaukee, Lake, Gladwin, and Arenac. Three counties in the southern Lower Peninsula also are affected: Ionia, Cass, and Sanilac.

Distance to the Nearest Birthing Hospital

When calculating the distance from the population center of each county, 20% of Michigan’s counties are 30 miles or more from the nearest birthing hospital, whereas 49% of counties are within 10 miles or less. The three Michigan counties where women travel the furthest to give birth are all located in the Upper Peninsula. Luce County residents have the longest commute (67 miles). Schoolcraft County residents have the second-longest commute (61 miles), followed by Ontonagon County residents (55 miles).

Table 1

Birthing Hospital Closures Since 2010	
County	Year Closed
Keweenaw	2024
Branch	2023
Montcalm	2023
Oakland	2022
St. Clair	2022
Lenawee	2020
Lenawee	2020
Manistee	2019
Montcalm	2018
St. Joseph	2018
Cheboygan	2010

¹ Cohen, Elizabeth, "As midwife-assisted home births are on the rise, so too do high-risk births outside hospitals.", *STAT News*, 2-23-2024. Retrieved on 6-5-2025.

² "Planned Home Birth", *American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists' Committee on Obstetric Practice*. Retrieved on 6-5-2025.

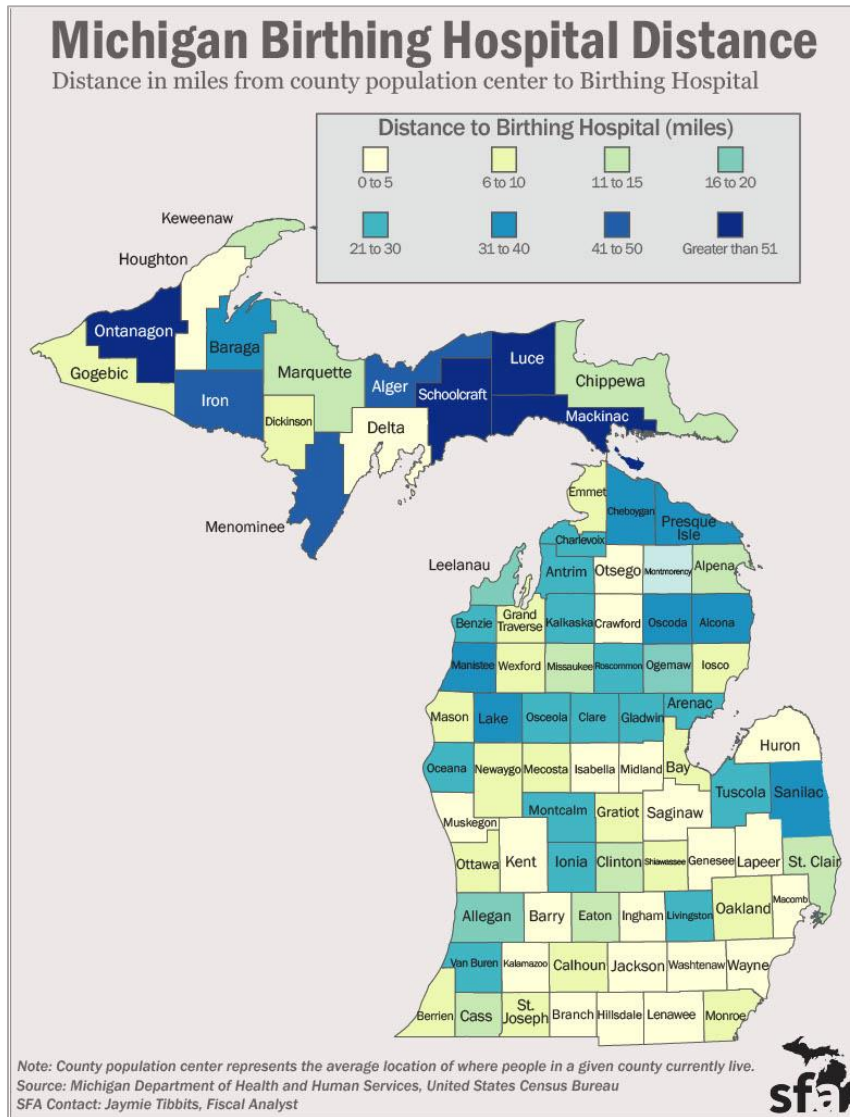
³ Kozhimannil, Katy B., *et al.*, "Obstetric care access at rural and urban hospitals in the United States", *JAMA*, 333(2), 166-169.

⁴ "Births Financed by Medicaid by Metropolitan Status", *KFF*. Retrieved on 7-28-2025.

⁵ "Urban and Rural", *United States Census Bureau*, 2024. Retrieved on 8-1-2025.

⁶ "Where You Live Matters: Maternity Care in Michigan", *March of Dimes*, 2024. Retrieved on 6-5-2025.

Figure 1



Crude Birth Rate by County

The crude birth rate is the number of live births in a county over a given year, divided by the midyear population in that region, multiplied by 1,000.⁷ Michigan’s birth rate has largely declined since the height of the Baby Boomer generation in 1950, when there were 25.1 births per 1,000 people.⁸ While the State experienced flat periods over the past 65 years, 2023 was the first year on record the birth rate fell to the single digits (9.9) and lost another 0.25 percentage points in 2024 (9.65). As a state with a mix of rural and urban counties, Michigan is comprised of varying birth rates, as shown by the tables in [Table 2](#) below:

Table 2

5 Counties with the Highest Birth Rate	
County	Birth Rate
Kent	11.88
Keweenaw	11.57
Calhoun	11.09
Wayne	11.08
Missaukee	11.02

5 Counties with the Lowest Birth Rate	
County	Birth Rate
Menominee	2.77
Ontonagon	4.29
Gogebic	5.27
Schoolcraft	5.62
Cass	5.7

⁷ “Metadata Glossary”, World Bank Group. Retrieved on 7-28-2025.

⁸ “Live Births and Crude Birth Rates Michigan and United States Residents Selected Years, 1900 - 2023”, Michigan Department of Health and Human Services. Retrieved on 7-28-2025.