



Healthcare Outlook for Alabama 2026

“What on Earth is
Going on Around
Here?”

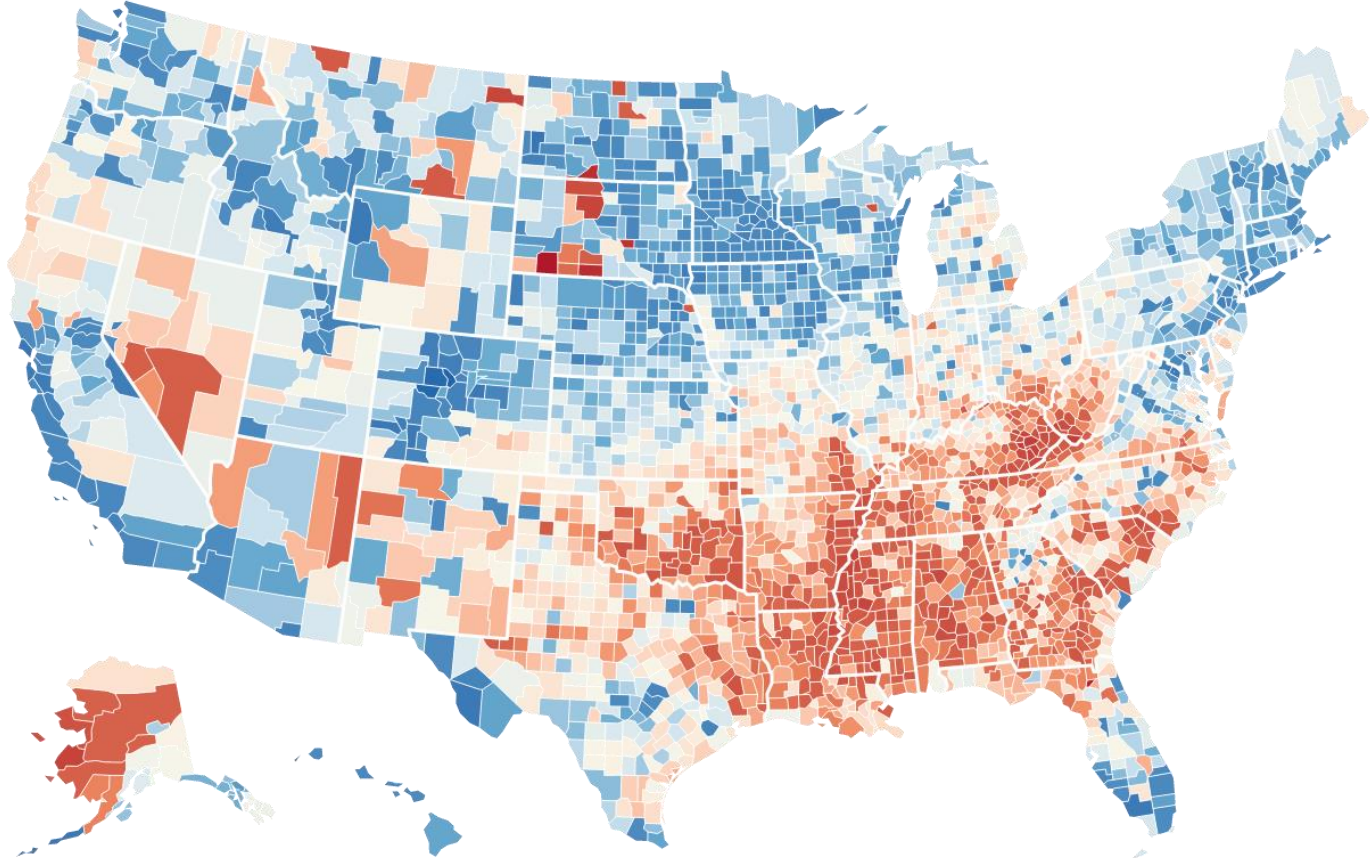
Scott Harris, MD, MPH

Alabama Rural Health Annual Conference

March 20, 2026

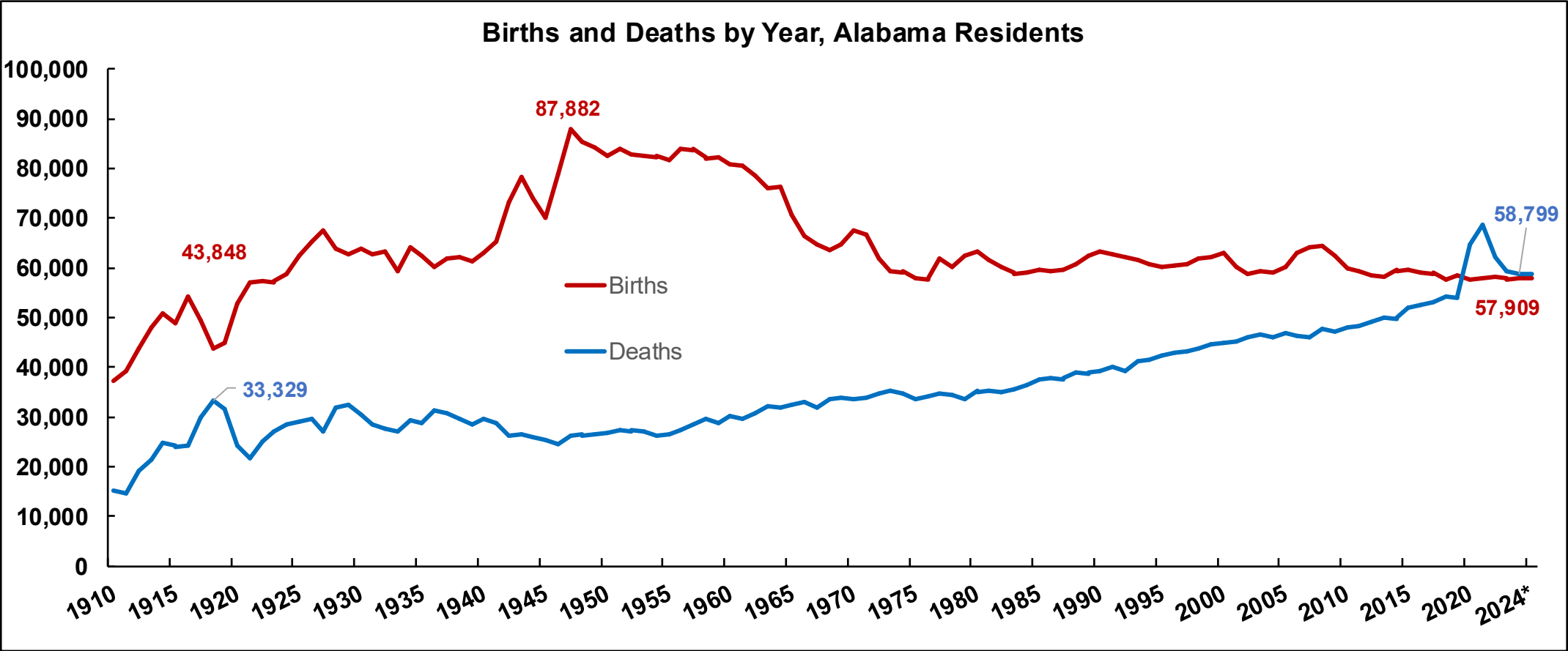
Life Expectancy in America

Average age at death

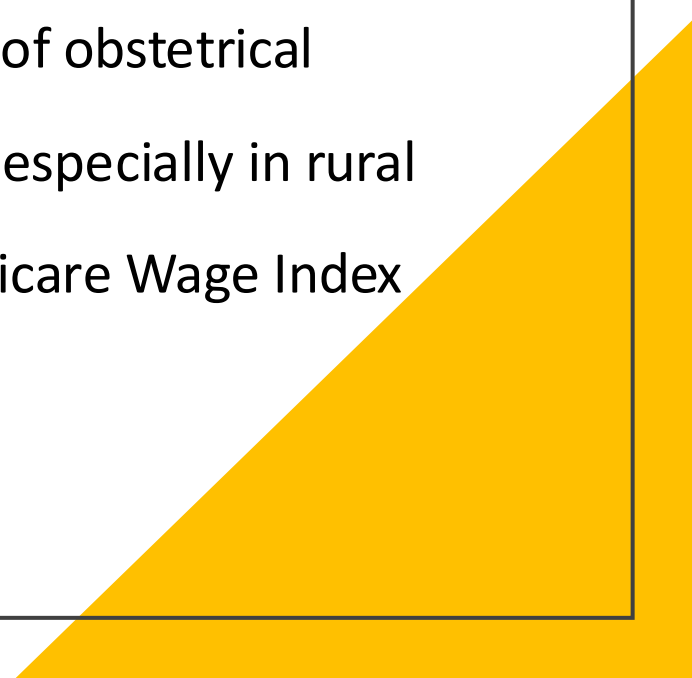


Map: Jeremy Ney • Source: GHDX • Created with Datawrapper

Births and Deaths by Year Alabama Residents, 1910-2024



Alabama's Public Health Challenges

- Poverty
 - Prevalence of chronic diseases
 - Lack of access to care
 - Shortage of health care providers & aging provider workforce
 - Hospital closures & loss of obstetrical services
 - Transportation barriers, especially in rural areas
 - Death spiral of low Medicare Wage Index
 - No Medicaid expansion
 - Health literacy
- 
- A large yellow triangle is positioned in the bottom right corner of the slide, pointing towards the top right.

Determinants of health



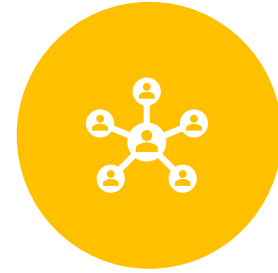
BIOLOGIC



BEHAVIORAL



HEALTHCARE



SOCIAL

So, what is “Public Health” anyway?

- The science and practice of improving the health and survival of populations
- Key areas include epidemiology, outbreak control, environmental health, health promotion & education, and health policy



Who is doing public health in Alabama?

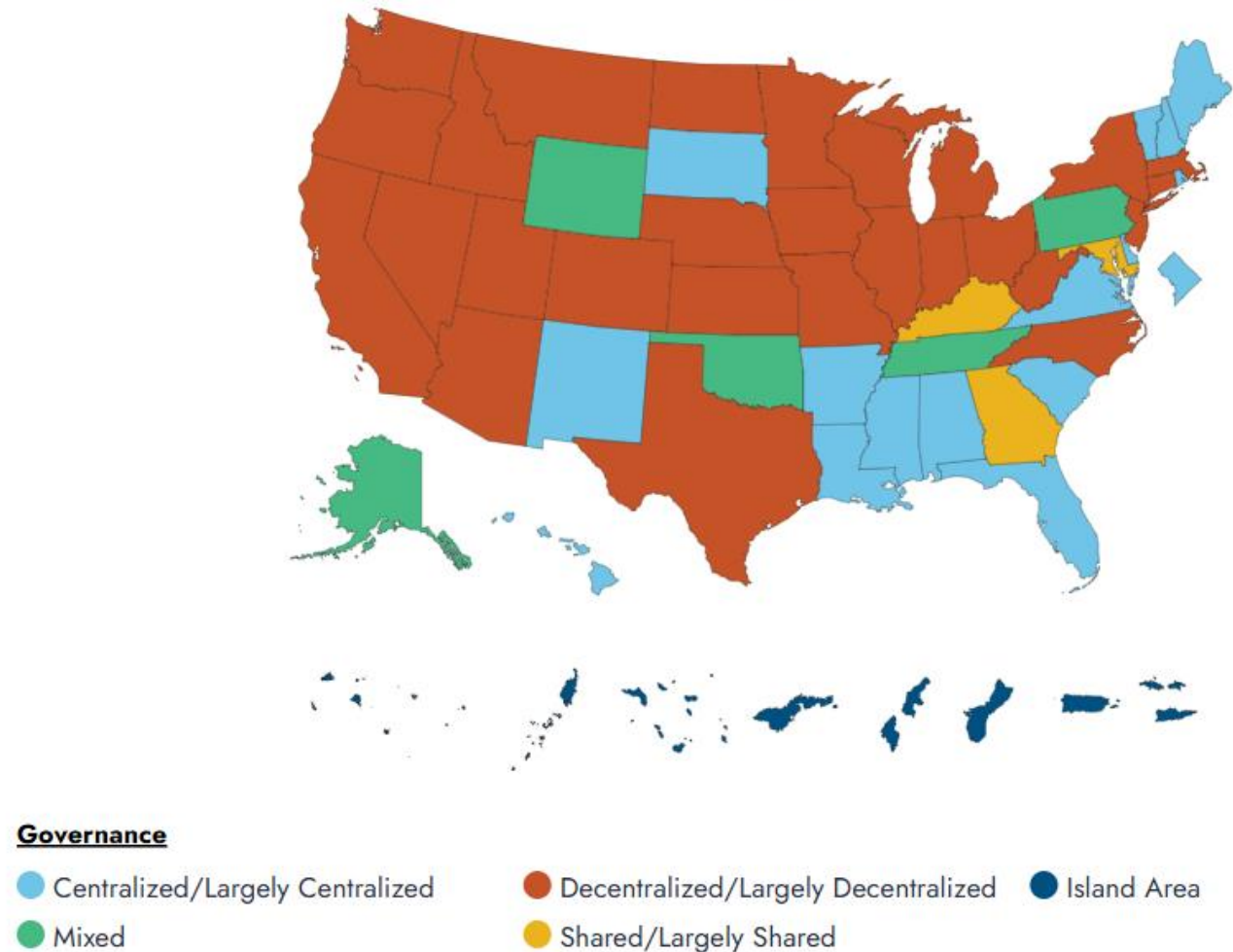
- Governmental (federal, state & local)
- Health care providers and facilities
- Academia
- Nonprofits, community-based organizations and faith-based initiatives
- Commercial & industrial employers
- No national PH system, only a nation-wide PH system... “patchwork quilt”

“If you’ve seen one health department...”

- Mix of centralized and decentralized systems
- Over 3,400 local health departments
- 59 separate states, U.S. territories, freely-associated states and D.C.
- Variety of funding mechanisms and regulatory authority

Characteristics of US States and Island Area Public Health Agencies, 2022

Governance





How is
ADPH
different?

Primary responsibility for sixty-five counties

Two quasi-independent metro health departments (Jefferson & Mobile)

Separate Medicaid and environmental agencies in Alabama

No Medicaid expansion

ADPH Public Health Districts





Clinical Services

- Immunizations for children (VFC)
- Disease control (STIs, tuberculosis)
- Family planning
- Home health
- Children's Health Insurance Program (All Kids)
- NO primary care services (except Jefferson & Mobile counties)



Regulatory services

Licensure for use of medical, commercial & industrial radiation sources

Food / milk / lodging program

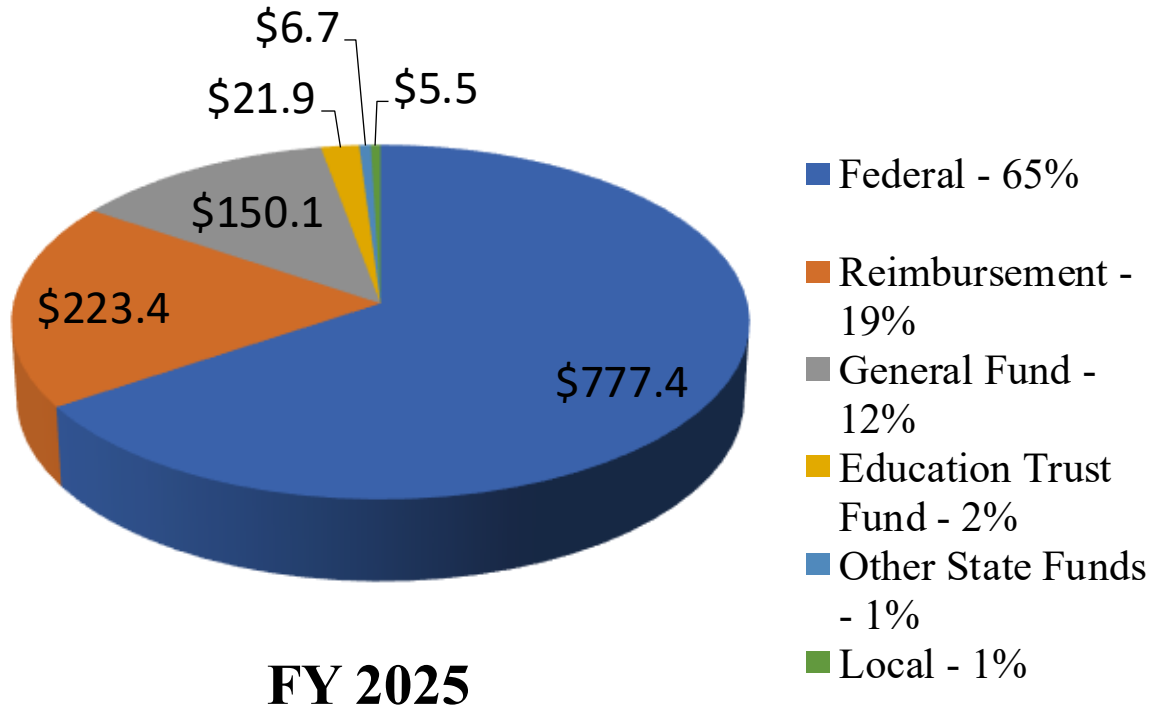
Oyster beds

Septic systems

Infectious diseases & outbreaks

Health care facility licensure and certification

Who pays for this?



- Less than 15% of department revenue comes from state dollars
- Alabama receives less of its revenue from state funds than any other state
- Almost no local funding

Hot Topics in Alabama

- Measles and other vaccine preventable diseases
- Infant mortality
- Black Belt wastewater issues
- Rural infrastructure and the Rural Health Transformation Grant

Measles is back...!!!

- The MOST infectious disease
- Over 2,200 *confirmed* cases in 47 jurisdictions in 2025 in the USA , **but** over 1,300 cases in 2026 so far
- Highly preventable with vaccination
- Loss of measles elimination status

MEASLES

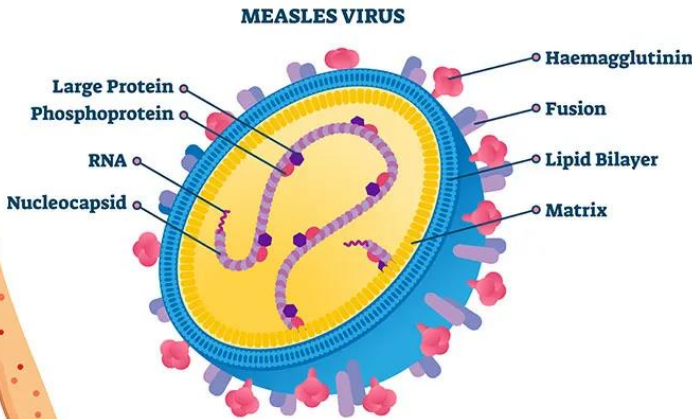
MEASLES is a Highly Contagious Infectious Disease Caused by the Measles Virus

The Measles VACCINE is Effective at Preventing the Disease







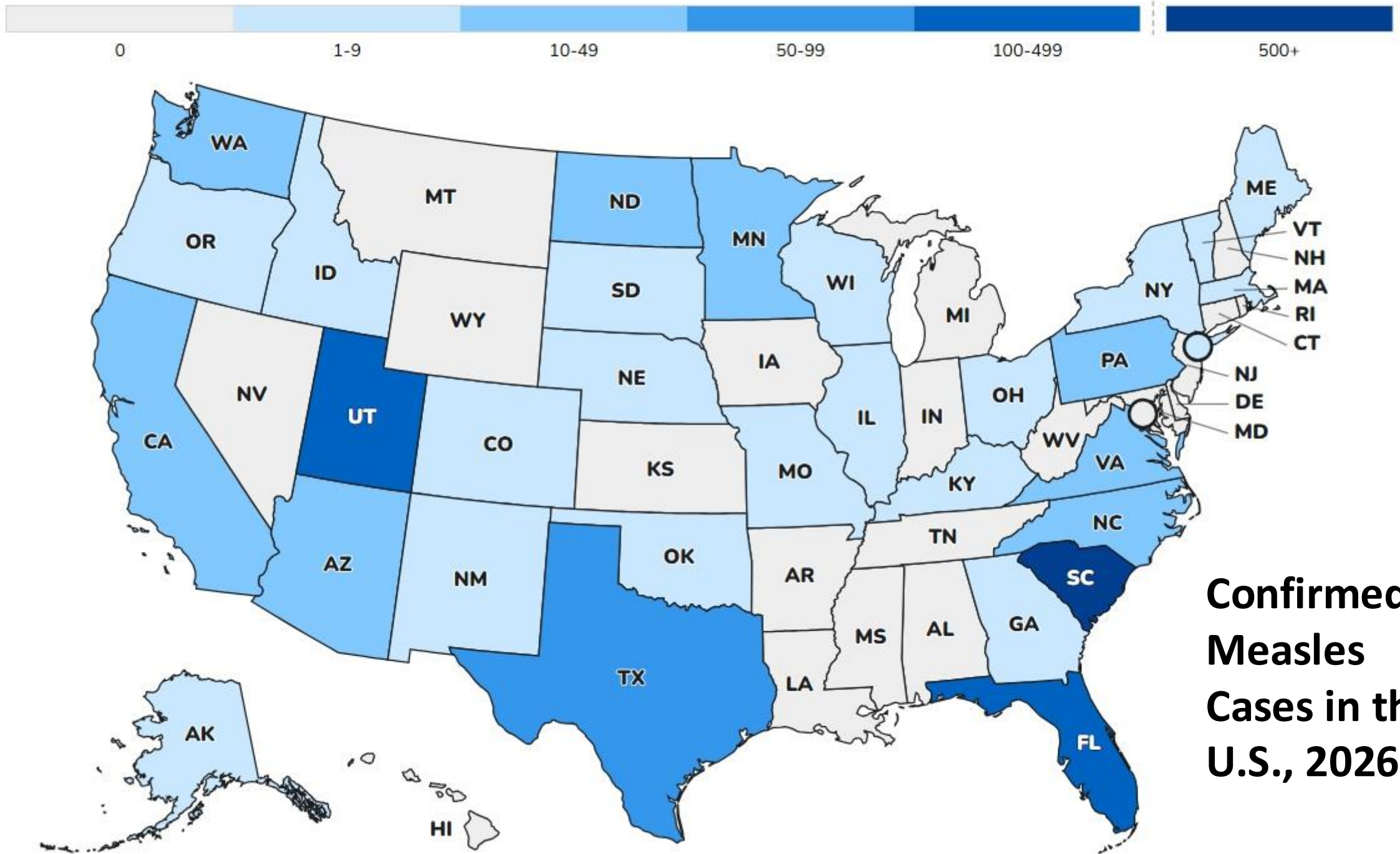
-  Fever
-  Red, Blotchy Rash First Appears on the Forehead
-  Red Inflamed Eyes
-  Runny Nose
-  Hacking Cough and Sore Throat
-  Koplik's Spots Inside the Mouth

SYMPTOMS



COMPLICATIONS

-  Pneumonia
-  Severe Diarrhea
-  Encephalitis
-  Blindness
-  Ear Infection





Pertussis in Alabama

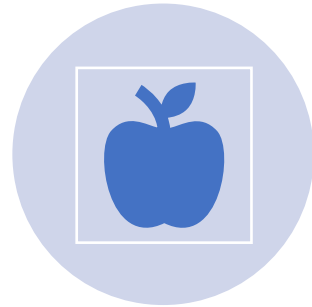
- 53 cases (so far) in Alabama in 2026
- Previous years:
 - 2023 – 42
 - 2024 – 505
 - 2025 – 990



Infant Mortality



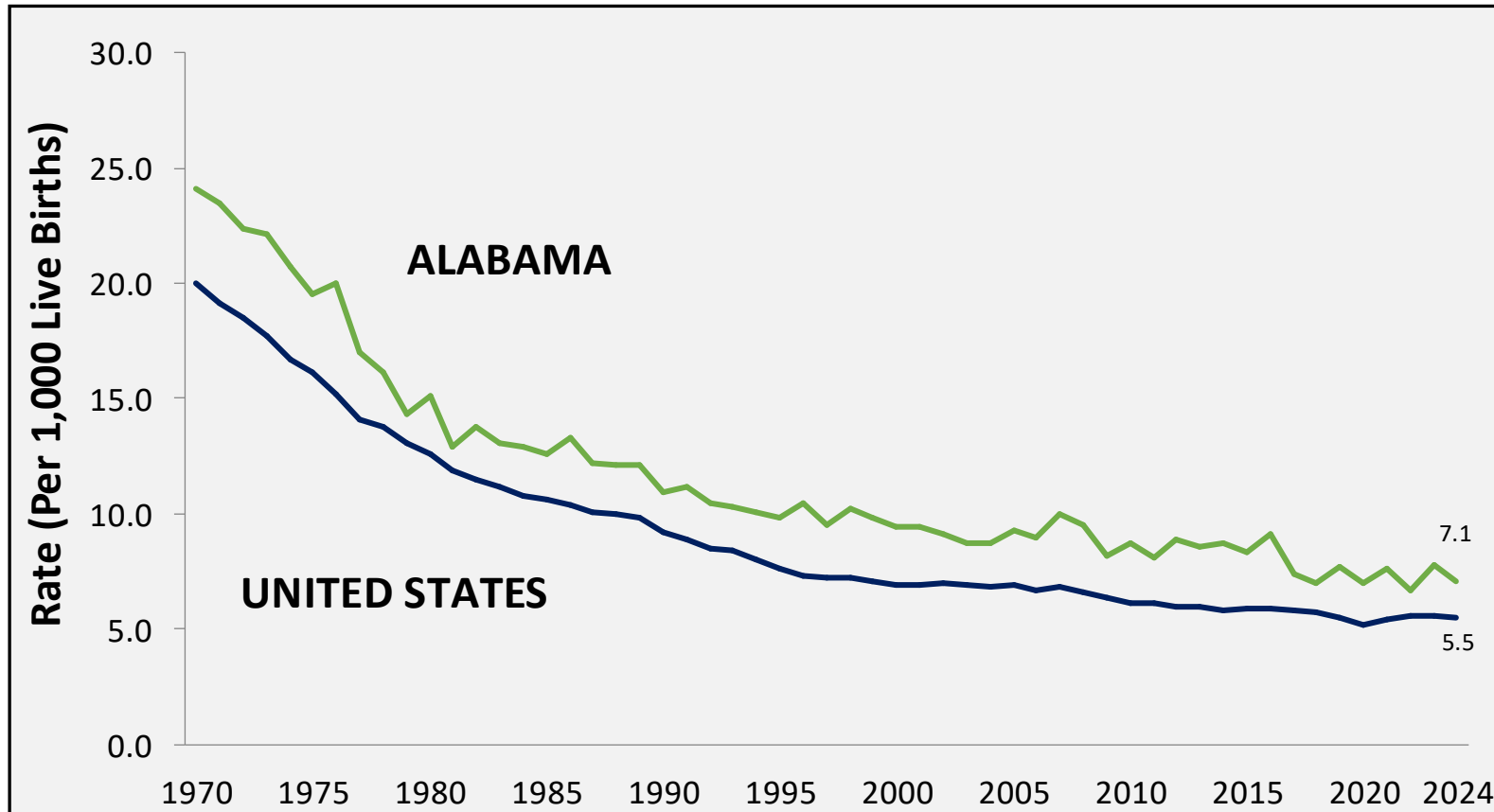
I.M. RATE INVOLVES MANY
ASPECTS OF HEALTH CARE
AND POLICY



COMPARE "APPLES TO
APPLES" ACROSS STATES AND
COUNTRIES

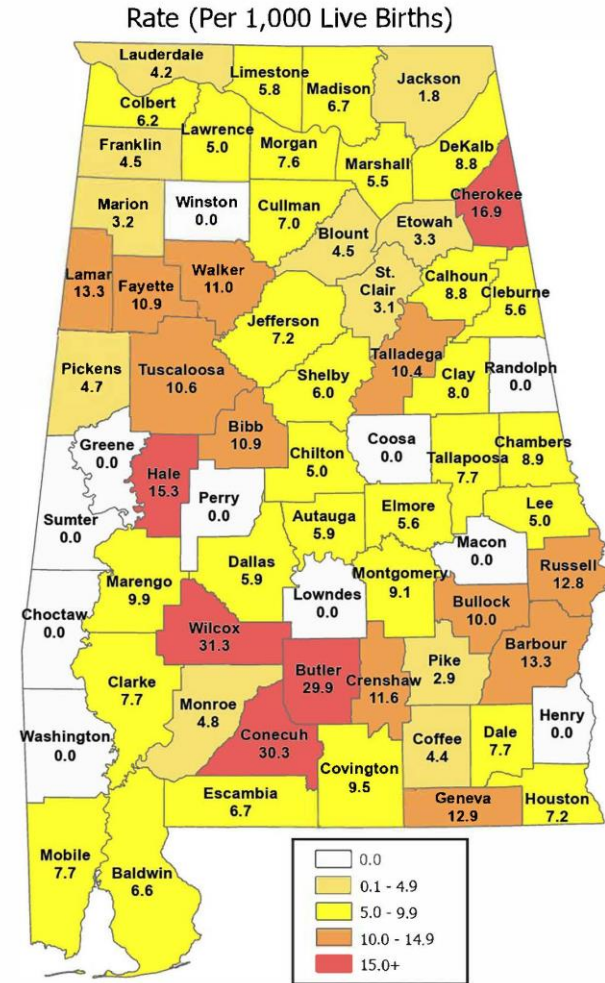
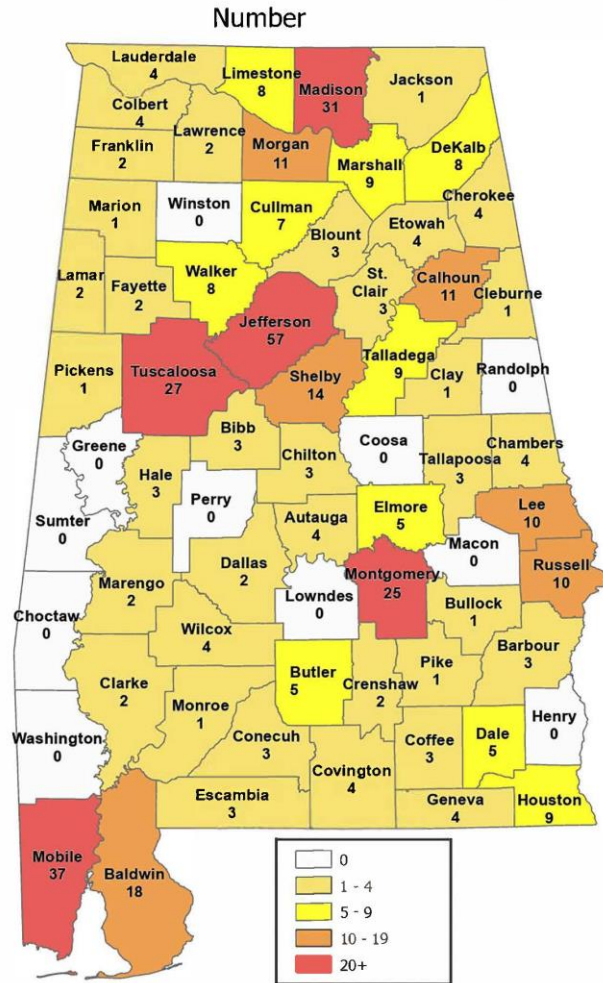


Infant Mortality Rates Alabama & USA¹, 1970-2024

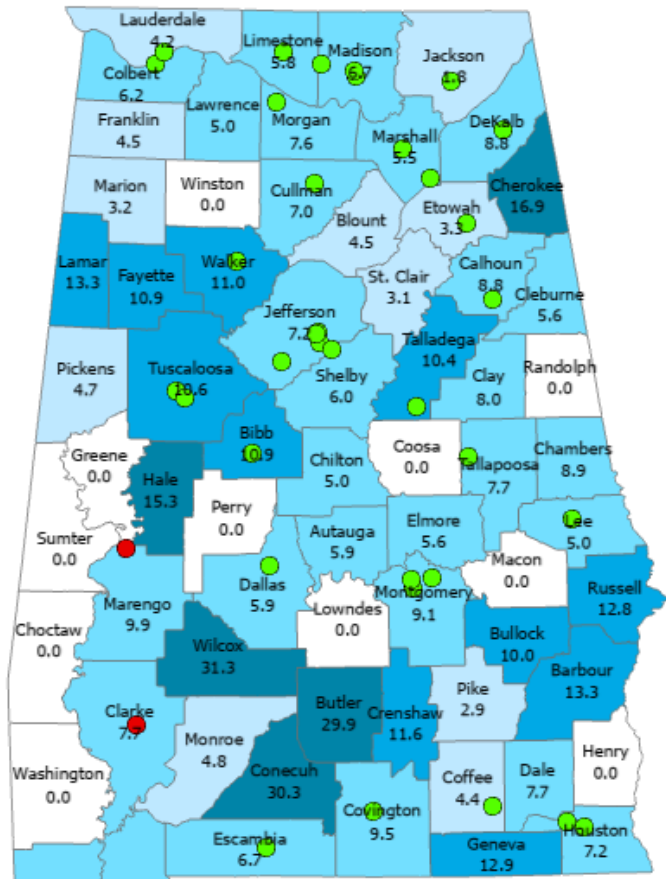


¹ 2024 national data is provisional.

INFANT MORTALITY BY COUNTY OF RESIDENCE ALABAMA, 2024



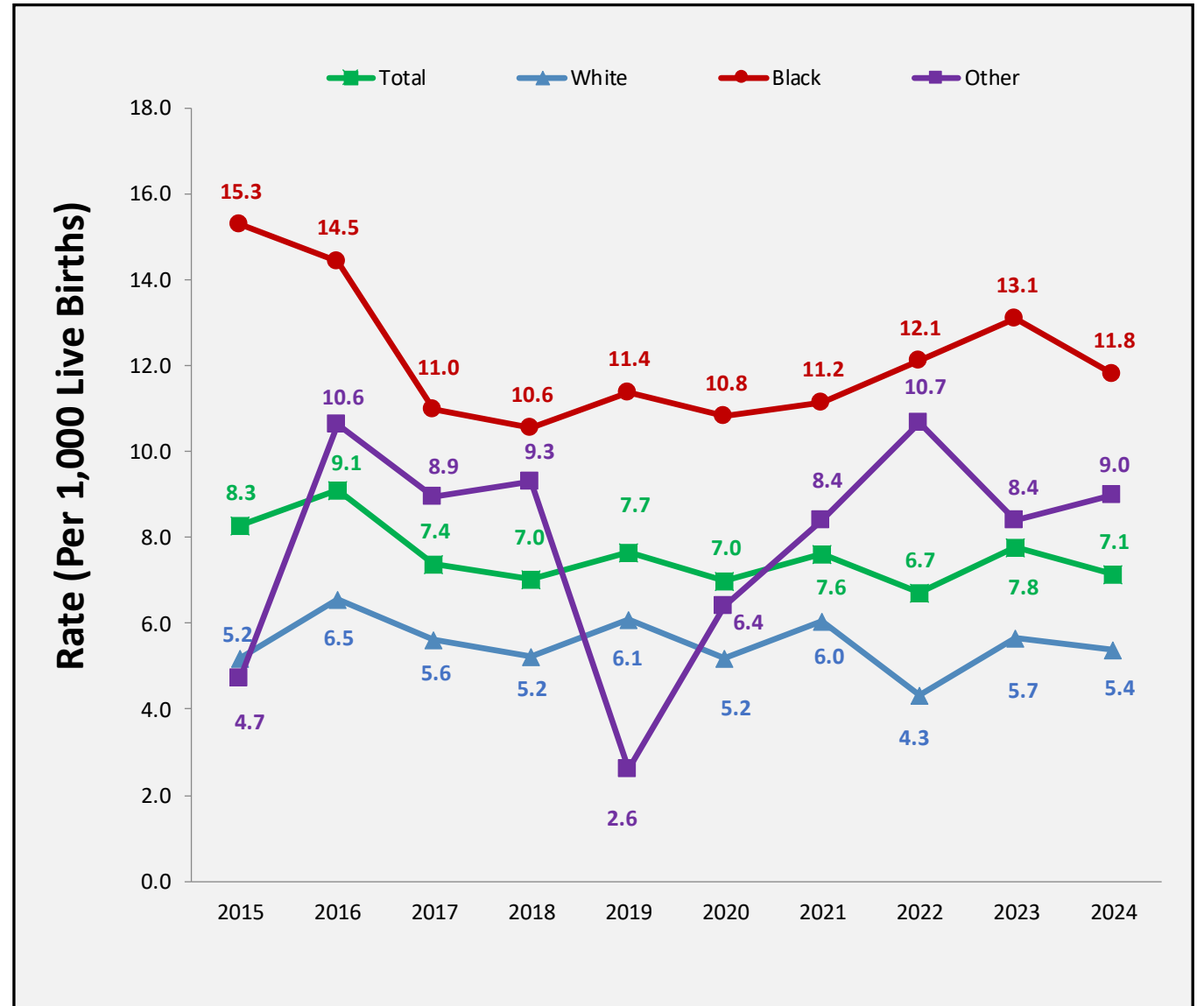
County IMRs and Delivering Hospital Status



The 2024 Statewide IMR was 7.1 per 1,000 Live Births

- No Infant Deaths
- Less than 5.0 per 1,000
- 5.0 - 9.9 per 1,000
- 10.0 - 14.9 per 1,000
- More than 15.0 per 1,000
- Active Hospitals
- Inactive Hospitals

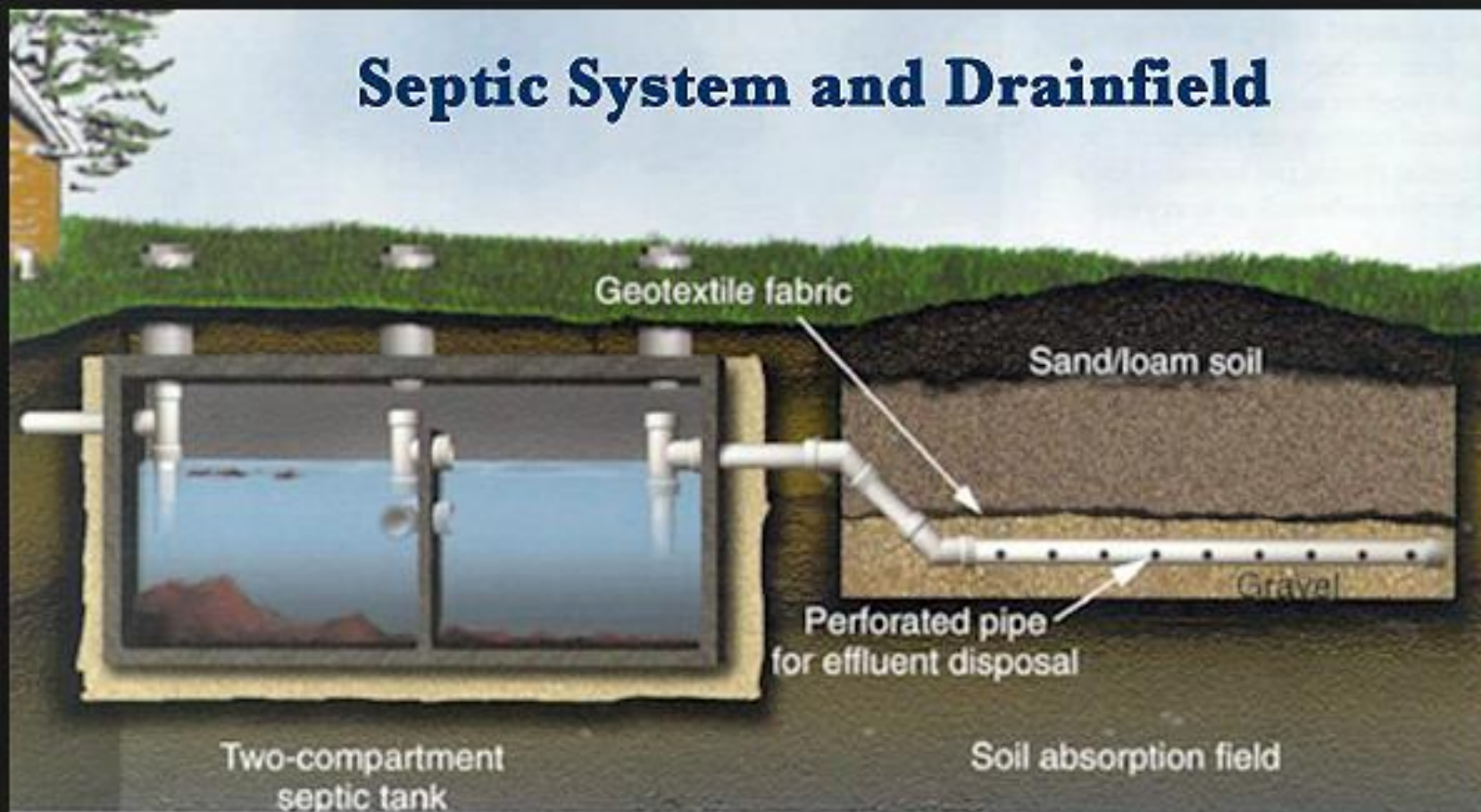
Infant Mortality Rates Alabama, 2015-2024



Black Belt Wastewater Issues

- Black Belt soil not conducive to conventional septic systems
- “Straight-piping” is a common practice
- HHS Office of Civil Rights / Department of Justice inquiry
- Installation of engineered systems on private property

Septic System and Drainfield



“Straight
pipe”



Rural Health Transformation Program



Created by Congress in 2025 to address rural health issues



Fifty billion dollars to be distributed among 50 states over 5 years



Alabama has received an award of \$203 million for 2026



Funding programs around rural hospitals, EMS, maternal & fetal health, mental health and others

Distribution of RHT funds for FY'26

- Rural Workforce: \$57.9 million
- Rural Health: \$55.9 million
- Collaborative Electronic Health Record, IT and Cybersecurity: \$31.4 million
- Cancer Digital Regionalization: \$8.1 million
- Mental Health: \$7.2 million
- Rural Health Practice: \$6.1 million
- Maternal and Fetal Health: \$6.1 million
- EMS Treat-In-Place: \$5 million
- Statewide EMS Trauma and Stroke: \$4 million
- Simulation Training: \$1 million

- Community Medicine: will not receive funding until year three of the program

