The Spatial Distribution of New York State's Older Population: Let's Keep New York's Older Adults Safe and Healthy during the Coronavirus Pandemic
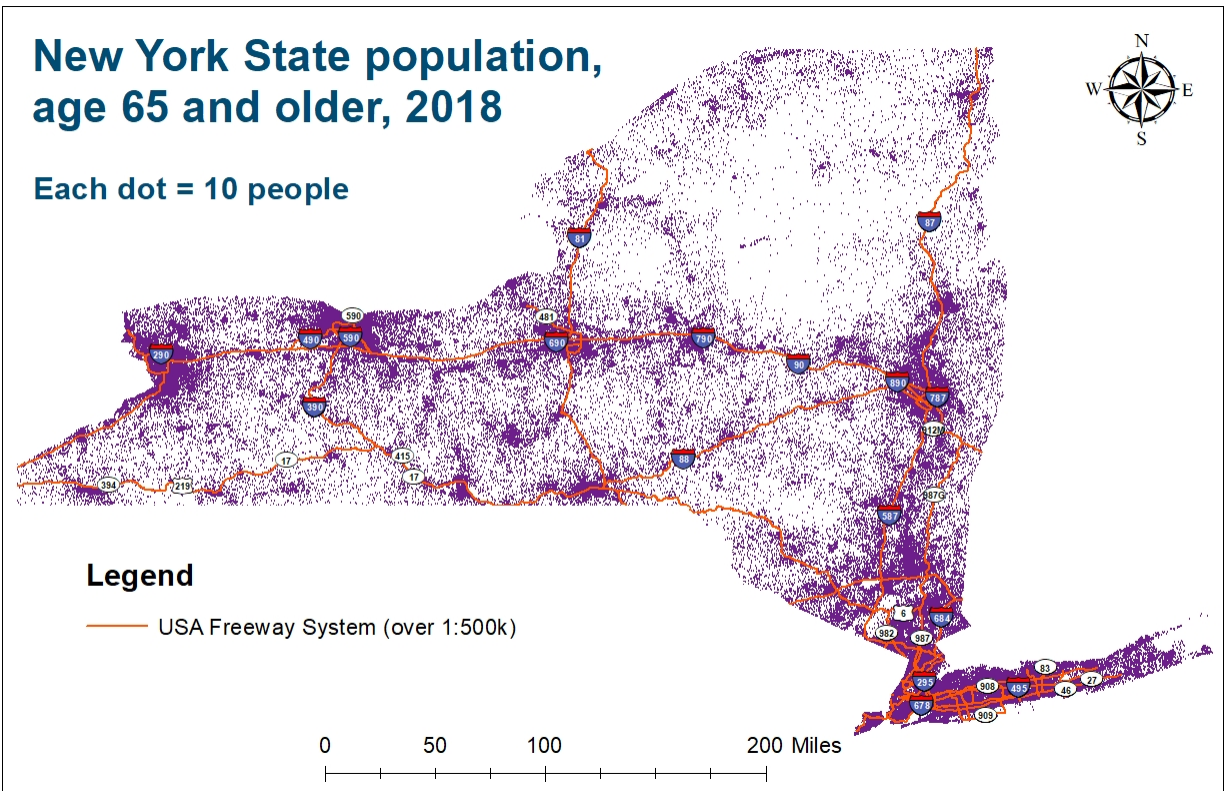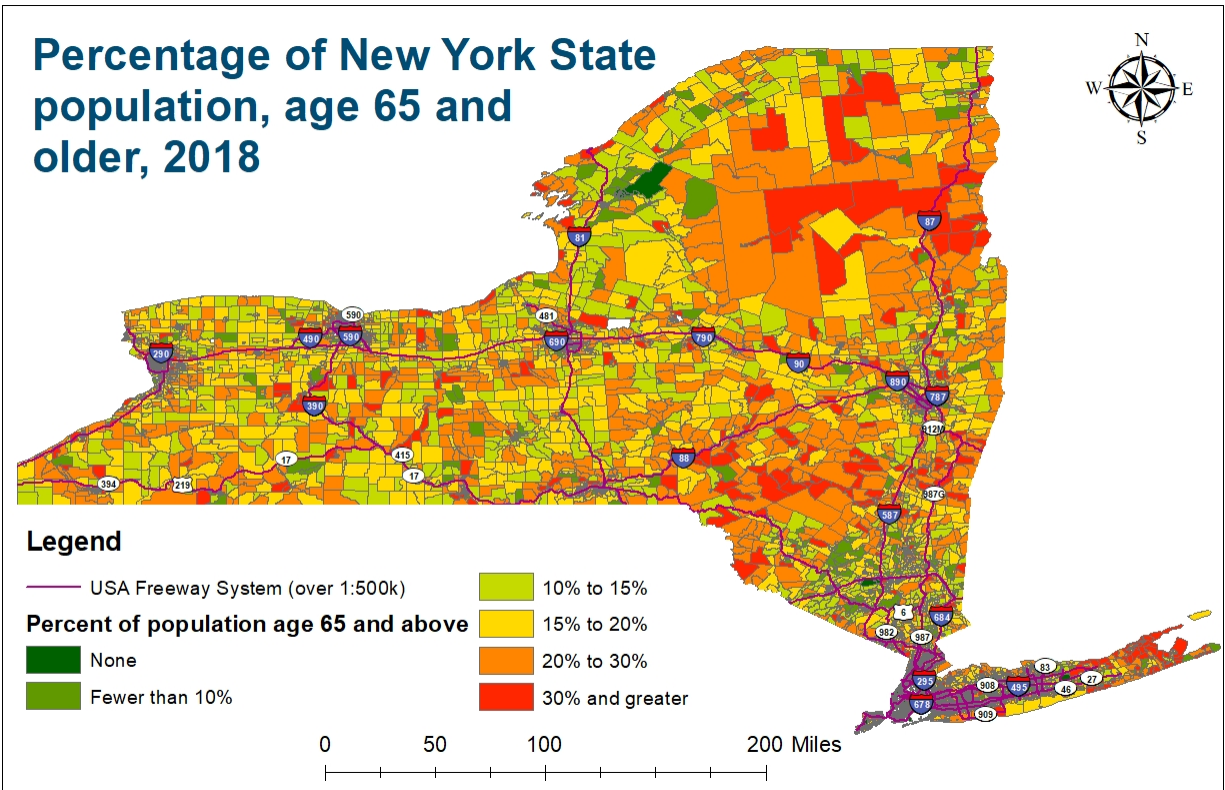
Mary E. Helander

The emergent infectious respiratory disease (COVID-19), caused by the novel coronavirus, is of grave concern for all, and especially for older adults. In addition to following the New York State guidance for protecting yourself and your family, social distancing and avoiding unnecessary contacts can help our communities to protect older adults.

Inspired by the work of Professor Kenneth Johnson at the University of New Hampshire, Carsey School of Public Policy, we replicated the New Hampshire maps described in his research brief published on March 17, 2020.[1]

Similar to New Hampshire, providing health care for the coronavirus may be complicated because older adults represent a larger share of New York State's population in some areas than in others (see Figures on page 2). In New York State, most older adults live near the urban centers of New York City, Buffalo, Rochester, Albany, Syracuse, Utica, Binghamton, as well as all across Long Island.

Although most older adults live in urban centers, older adults make up a larger share of rural counties in New York State. This has implications for health care delivery: the few hospitals in non-urban areas are smaller and may be quickly overwhelmed by a spike in demand for care of severe COVID cases. Availability of transportation resources, coupled with longer travel times to urban medical facilities, will complicate providing testing for rural older adults and providing treatment to rural older adults who become seriously ill.

Similar to New Hampshire, large concentrations of younger adults and children in high population areas could make virus transmission and community spread more likely (Johnson, 2020). Older adults, overall, are often more socially isolated. Finding ways to check in with them, without placing them at risk of unknowing exposure and while following safe social distancing practices, is important for helping to keep our older adults safe and healthy.

Percentage of New York State population, age 65 and older, 2018

Legend

— USA Freeway System (over 1:500k)

Percent of population age 65 and above

- None
- Fewer than 10%
- 10% to 15%
- 15% to 20%
- 20% to 30%
- 30% and greater

0   50   100   200 Miles

New York State population, age 65 and older, 2018

Each dot = 10 people

Legend

— USA Freeway System (over 1:500k)

0   50   100   200 Miles

Maps: Mary E. Helander; *Data Source*: US Census Bureau, Population and Age Data by Block Groups for New York State, (2018, American Community Survey). In SocialExplorer.com. Retrieved March 17, 2020 from:
https://www.socialexplorer.com/tables/ACS2018_5yr/R12495200

Reference

1. Johnson, Kenneth. 2020. "Distribution of New Hampshire's Older Population Complicates Health Care Delivery During Coronavirus Epidemic." Carsey School of Public Policy, University of New Hampshire. Accessed March 18, 2020 at: https://carsey.unh.edu/publication/snapshot/NH-older-population-coronavirus,

Acknowledgements

About the Author

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The mission of the Lerner Center for Public Health Promotion at Syracuse University is to improve population health through applied research and evaluation, education, engaged service, and advocating for evidence-based policy and practice change.

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