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Introduction

The purpose of this project was to prepare data for an analysis of the relationship between COVID-19 cases and deaths and air pollution. The specific focus was on fine particulate matter (PM2.5) since previous research has reported a relationship between exposure to this particulate matter and COVID-19 death rates (pre-print provided here: <https://www.medrxiv.org/content/10.1101/2020.04.05.20054502v2>).

Extract

Data for this hypothetical analysis were obtained from two sources. The first was from the project “Johns Hopkins COVID-19 Case Tracker” on the website data.world. We used the dataset titled “2\_cases\_and\_deats\_by\_county\_timeseries.csv” (i.e., the COVID data) which included new counts of cases and deaths by county by day. The second dataset was obtained through a request to the United States Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Air Quality System (AQS) API. In reviewing the documentation we found that PM2.5 is measured every hour per county on every third day using multiple different measurement techniques. Our group determined we only wanted the 24 hour average of PM2.5 using the most recent measurement technique, which began in 2012. We wrote a for loop to only request this type of measurement, which allowed us to obtain PM2.5 counts per county per day.

Transform

In reading documentation on the COVID data, we could see that several of the columns were superfluous. UID was a unique identifier for a location, as assigned by Johns Hopkins, so it was deleted. Documentation also stated that sometimes the fips-code variable was used to identify exceptions, such as the Grand Princess cruise ship. In sorting the data we could see that the fips code was 99999 in these cases. Other sources suggested the highest “real” fips code we should ever see is 78030 (<https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/detail/national/home/?cid=nrcs143_013697>). Based on this documentation, we filtered the data to only include fips codes lower than 78030. This yielded a max fips code of 56045, which corresponds to Weston, Wyoming. Next, the dataset was sorted by date to determine if any data prior to 1/22/2020 were included. It was not, so no dates were deleted. We also inspected other columns in the dataset using the describe function to be sure the data included realistic values.

Load