



Child Hunger Fact Sheet

September 2017

In the United States today, nearly 13 million children face hunger. While hunger is harmful to everyone, it can be especially devastating to children because of its potential for long-term consequences.

Good nutrition, particularly in the first three years of life, is important for establishing a solid foundation that has implications for a child's future physical and mental health, academic achievement and economic productivity. Hunger threatens this critical foundation, which in turn, threatens a child's opportunity to thrive. Below are a series of facts regarding child hunger in the United States.

FOOD INSECURITY AMONG CHILDREN

- 12.9 million children lived in food-insecure households in 2016.¹
- Twenty percent or more of children in 22 states and DC lived in food-insecure households in 2015 according to the most recent data available.²
- In 2015, the top five states with the highest rates of food-insecure children were Mississippi (26%), Arkansas (25%), New Mexico (25%), Alabama (24%) and Arizona (24%).³
- In 2015, the top five states with the lowest rates of food-insecure children were North Dakota, New Hampshire, Massachusetts, Minnesota and Virginia.⁴
- In 2016, 13.3 million or approximately 18% of children in the U.S. lived in poverty.⁵

FOOD ASSISTANCE AMONG CHILDREN

- Twelve million children are estimated to be served by the Feeding America network, over 3.5 million who are ages 5 and under.⁶





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FOOD ASSISTANCE AMONG CHILDREN CONT.

- Nearly 1 in 4 (24%) households we serve with children report participation in the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC).⁷
- While almost all (94%) of households we serve with school-aged children (ages 5-18) report participating in the National School Lunch Program, only 46% report participating in the School Breakfast Program.⁸
- In fiscal year 2015, nearly 20 million or 44% of all SNAP participants were children under age 18.⁹
- During the 2015 federal fiscal year, 22 million low-income children received free or reduced-priced meals daily through the National School Lunch Program.¹⁰ Unfortunately, in 2015 fewer than 4 million children participated daily in the Summer Food Service Program and the Seamless Summer Option.¹¹

FOOD ASSISTANCE AMONG CHILDREN

Infancy and Development

Children growing up in food-insecure families are [vulnerable to poor health and stunted development](#) from the earliest stages of life.¹²

- Pregnant women who experience food insecurity are more likely to experience birth complications than women who are food secure.¹³
- Inadequate access to food during pregnancy has been shown to increase the risk for low birth weight in babies.¹⁴
- Food insecurity has also been linked with delayed development, poorer attachment, and learning difficulties in the first two years of life.¹⁵

Health Concerns

Studies have found that food insecurity has been associated with health problems for children that may hinder their ability to function normally and participate fully in school and other activities.

- Children who are food insecure are more likely to require hospitalization.¹⁶
- Children who are food insecure may be at higher risk for chronic health conditions such as anemia¹⁸ and asthma.¹⁷
- Children who are food insecure may have more frequent instances of oral health problems.²⁰
- Food insecurity among young children is associated with poorer physical quality of life,²¹ which may prevent them from fully engaging in daily activities such as school and social interactions with peers.



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Behavioral Challenges

Children who experience food insecurity may be at higher risk for behavioral issues and social difficulties.

- Food-insecure children may be at a greater risk of truancy and school tardiness.²²
- When they are in school, children who are food insecure may experience increases in an array of behavior problems including: fighting,²³ hyperactivities, aggression,²⁴ anxiety,²⁵ mood swings and bullying.²⁶



References

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