



Washington Office
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
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Fast Facts on Child Hunger

U.S. Hunger at a Glance:

- ❖ Nearly 1 in 4 children (16.7 million) live in families struggling against hunger.
- ❖ Child hunger increased 34% from 2007 to 2008, an increase of 4.2 million children in one year.
- ❖ Households with children are almost twice as likely to experience hunger as households without children (21% compared to 11.3%).
- ❖ 1 in 3 African American and Latino children are food insecure.
- ❖ Nearly 14 million children in the United States – 19% of all children – live in families with incomes below the federal poverty level – \$22,050 a year for a family of four.
- ❖ 1.8 million homes with children receive food from food pantries.
- ❖ In December 2009, SNAP/Food Stamps participation rose to nearly 39 million, an increase of nearly 800,000 individuals from November 2009 – the prior record level – and an increase of nearly 7.2 million people compared with December 2008.
- ❖ 1 out of 6 kids lives in a food insecure household.
- ❖ 8 states plus DC have more than 20% of children living in food insecure households.
- ❖ In 2007, 17.9 million low-income children received free or reduced price meals through the National School Lunch Program.

Effects of Food Insecurity on Children:

Physical Health:

Children from food insecure households are at greater risk of:

- ❖ Impaired cognitive development
- ❖ Nutrition Deprivation: Resulting in increased vulnerability to infection, sickness or hospitalization.
- ❖ Obesity: Due to the over consumption of low-cost foods with a high caloric content and little nutritional value.
- ❖ Tooth Decay: Resulting from poor dental health and consumption of highly processed or sugary foods.

Mental Health and Behavioral:

Children from food insecure households are more likely to require mental health counseling and experience emotional or behavioral problems, such as:

- ❖ Aggression
- ❖ Anxiety
- ❖ Depression
- ❖ Hyperactivity
- ❖ Psychosocial dysfunction

Child Development:

Food insecure children are more likely to be *developmentally at risk*, characterized by slow or unusual development in areas such as:

- ❖ Speech or language abilities
- ❖ Social skills
- ❖ Cognitive growth and memory
- ❖ Behavior
- ❖ Motor skills and movement

School Readiness and Achievement:

Due to impaired cognitive development, children from food-insecure households often have increased risk for:

- ❖ Delayed school readiness
- ❖ Lower reading and math test scores
- ❖ Need of special educational services
- ❖ Grade repetition
- ❖ Difficulties paying attention in class or focusing on studies
- ❖ Lower achievement and classroom productivity
- ❖ School absences and tardiness

Definitions:

Food Insecurity:

The limited or uncertain availability of nutritionally adequate and safe foods, including involuntarily cutting back on meals, food portions or not knowing the source of the next meal. Also known as “at risk of hunger”. Includes categories of “low” and “very low” food security, indicating degrees to which food intake is reduced or normal eating patterns disrupted because of lack of money and other resources for food.

Food Security:

Access to enough food for an active, healthy life. At a minimum, food security includes the ready availability of nutritionally adequate and safe foods, and an assured ability to acquire acceptable foods in socially acceptable ways.

Hunger vs. Food Insecurity:

Hunger is often a symptom of acute food insecurity, but one does not depend upon the other. Hunger is not necessarily present where there is food insecurity, nor is food insecurity a pre-requisite for hunger. However, hungry children are more likely to exist in food insecure households.