Family Income & Childhood Poverty in California

Children Living in Poverty - Official Poverty Measure: 2014-2018; Showing Counties

What It Is
On kidsdata.org, family income and poverty are measured against a variety of income, resource, and self-sufficiency criteria:
- Federal Poverty Threshold
- Federal Poverty Guideline
- Supplemental Poverty Measure
- California Poverty Measure
- Self-Sufficiency Standard

For each of these measures, kidsdata.org provides estimates of the share of children (or families with children) without the economic means necessary for an adequate standard of living. Depending on the data source, additional measures and breakdowns also are available.

Why This Topic Is Important
Income and well being are intricately linked. Poverty can alter children's developmental trajectories in cognitive, socio-emotional, and physical health. The effects of poverty on child health and well being can begin during pregnancy, as low-income women are more likely to experience malnutrition and stress, and are less likely to receive adequate prenatal care. Children who face economic hardship when they are young, or who experience deep and prolonged poverty, are at greatest risk for poor outcomes. The effects of poverty and the stress associated with it can be lasting, contributing to increased risk of dropping out of school, poor adult health, and poor employment outcomes, among other adverse consequences. The impacts extend beyond individuals, too. For example, it is estimated that the total annual cost of child poverty in the U.S. is more than a trillion dollars, due in part to loss of economic productivity and increased health care costs. In addition, for every dollar spent on poverty reduction strategies, the U.S. could save an estimated $7 related to the economic costs of poverty.

How Children Are Faring
In 2018, an estimated 17% of California children lived below the federal poverty threshold ($25,465 annually for a family of two adults and two children). Across counties with data in 2018, official child poverty rates ranged from less than 4% in Marin County to more than 30% in Fresno County. In Merced and Tulare counties in 2018, more than one in eight children lived in deep poverty—i.e., on annual income lower than half the federal poverty threshold ($12,732 for two adults and two children in 2018).
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