Food Security in California

Definition: Estimated percentage of children ages 0-17 living in households with limited or uncertain access to adequate food (e.g., in 2017, 18.1% of California children lived in food insecure households).


Percentage of Children Ages 0-17 Living in Food Insecure Households

What It Is
Kidsdata.org provides the following indicators related to food security:

- The estimated number and percentage of children ages 0-17 living in households with limited or uncertain access to adequate food, as calculated by Feeding America; these data also are shown for U.S. congressional districts.
- The number of perinatal women and children ages 0-5 redeeming Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) food vouchers, by participant type; these data come from the California Dept. of Public Health.
- The number of individuals (children and adults), and the number and percentage of households by race/ethnicity, participating in CalFresh, California’s implementation of the federal SNAP (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program) or Food Stamps Program; these data are provided by the California Dept. of Social Services.

Why This Topic Is Important
Almost one in five California children live in households with limited or uncertain access to adequate food (1). California consistently has a higher percentage of children living in food-insecure households than the U.S. overall (1). Food-insecure children are more likely to experience a host of health problems, including developmental, cognitive, behavioral, and mental health issues. Among pregnant women, food insecurity is associated with negative physical and mental health outcomes, as well as pregnancy complications. Children and communities of color are disproportionately affected by food insecurity.

Food assistance programs, such as food stamps (i.e., the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), or CalFresh in California) and the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC) provide a safety net to help ensure that low-income children, expectant mothers, and families get adequate nutrition. These programs have been shown to alleviate poverty, reduce adverse birth outcomes, and improve children’s health in general.
children lived in food insecure households).


### Number of Participants in Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) Program: 2018

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>California</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Infants Under Age 1</td>
<td>190,902</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children Ages 1-5</td>
<td>548,127</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prenatal Mothers</td>
<td>83,717</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Breastfeeding Mothers</td>
<td>70,184</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Breastfeeding Mothers</td>
<td>59,060</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>951,990</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Definition:** Number of Women, Infants, and Children participants redeeming food vouchers in the month of January, by participant type (e.g., in January 2018, 548,127 WIC participants redeemed food vouchers for children ages 1-5).

Data Source: California Dept. of Public Health, *California Women, Infants and Children Program Redemption by County* (Nov. 2019).

### Number of Children and Adults Participating in CalFresh (Food Stamp) Program

![Chart showing number of participants in CalFresh program from 2000 to 2018.](chart)

**Definition:** Number of individuals (children and adults) receiving CalFresh benefits in the month of July (e.g., in July 2018, 3,912,714 Californians participated in CalFresh).

Data Source: California Dept. of Social Services, *CalFresh Data Tables* (Oct. 2018).

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**How Children Are Faring**

According to 2017 estimates, 18% of California children (more than 1.6 million) lived in households with uncertain or inadequate access to food, down from 27% (nearly 2.5 million children) in 2011. At the local level, the share of children living in food insecure households ranged from 13% to 30% across counties and congressional districts. Although the percentage of food-insecure children has been on the decline statewide and nationally since 2011, California rates consistent exceed those for the U.S. overall.

In January 2018, Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) program healthy food vouchers were redeemed for 951,990 children and perinatal women statewide, a drop of more than 30% compared with 2010. Across all years for which data are available, the majority of WIC's California participants were children ages 1-5 (548,127 in 2018), followed by infants (190,902 in 2018) and prenatal mothers (83,717 in 2018).

The CalFresh (Food Stamps) supplemental nutrition program served almost 4 million California children and adults in 1.9 million households in July 2018—more than double the number of participants served in 2000. From 2008 through 2018, Hispanic/Latino and white households together accounted for around three-quarters of participating households statewide.

View references for this text and additional research on this topic: https://www.kidsdata.org/topic/39/food-security/summary