KidsData

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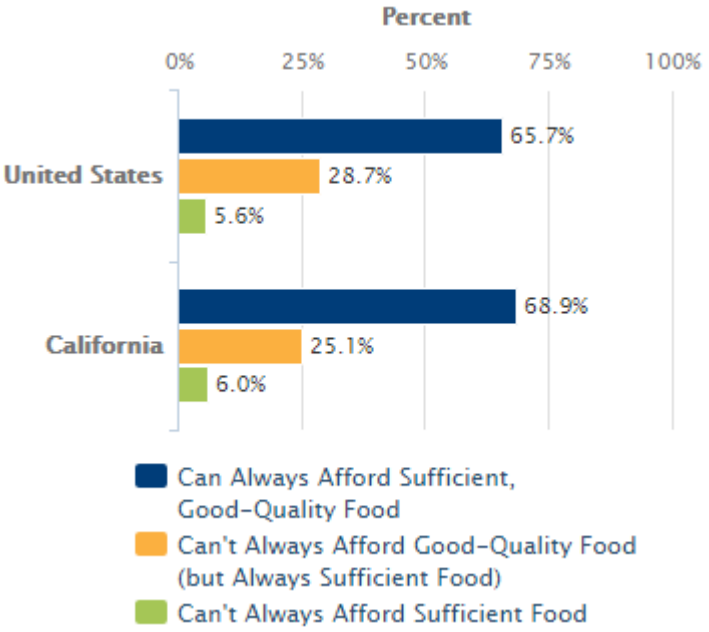
Food Security in California

Levels of Household Food Sufficiency Among Children Ages 0-17: 2024



Definition: Estimated percentage of children ages 0-17 living in households that could and could not meet their food needs in the previous 12 months, by household's ability to afford adequate, nutritious meals (e.g., in 2024, 25.1% of California children lived in households that in the previous year could always afford sufficient food but not always good-quality food).
Data Source: U.S. Dept. of Health and Human Services, National Survey of Children's Health (Feb. 2026).

Percentage of Children Living in Food Insecure Households: 2023

Locations	Percent
United States	19.2%
California	16.9%
Alameda County	12.2%
Contra Costa County	12.6%
Fresno County	21.8%
Kern County	21.7%
Los Angeles County	18.4%
Orange County	12.9%
Riverside County	14.7%
Sacramento County	18.6%
San Bernardino County	17.3%
San Diego County	14.5%
Santa Clara County	8.4%

Definition: Estimated percentage of children ages 0-17 living in households unable to provide adequate food for all household members for the entire year due to insufficient resources (e.g., in 2023, 16.9% of California children lived in food insecure households).
Data Source: Feeding America, Map the Meal Gap (Nov. 2025).

What It Is

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

- The estimated number and percentage of children ages 0-17 by level of household food sufficiency, for California and the U.S.
- The estimated number and percentage of children ages 0-17 living in food insecure households
- The number of children ages 0-17 participating in CalFresh in the month of July; the number of total CalFresh participants (children and adults) also is available
- The number of families redeeming Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) food vouchers in the month of January; for years 2019 and earlier, these data are available by type of WIC participant

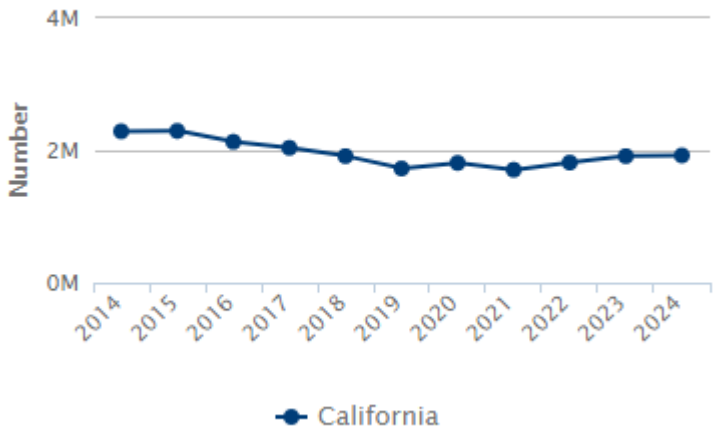
Why This Topic Is Important

In California and the U.S., more than 1 in 6 children live in households without the resources for consistent, dependable access to enough food for all household members to enjoy active, healthy lives. Uncertain access to food can cause stress for families and disrupt children's ability to concentrate and engage fully in school, social, and physical activities. Compared with food-secure children, children experiencing food insecurity are at higher risk for a host of health problems—with potentially lifelong impacts—including developmental, behavioral, and mental health issues, as well as acute and chronic medical conditions. Food insecurity in children also is linked to higher rates of hospital and emergency room visits and lower academic performance. Among pregnant women, food insecurity is associated with negative physical and mental health outcomes, as well as pregnancy complications.

Food insecurity disproportionately affects households with children (particularly young children under age 6) or adults with disabilities, households with incomes below 185% of the federal poverty threshold, single-parent families, households of color, and children living with foreign-born or limited English-speaking parents. Rural areas and urban centers also tend to have higher food insecurity rates than suburbs.

Food assistance programs, such as school

Number of Children Participating in CalFresh



Definition: Number of children ages 0-17 receiving CalFresh benefits in the month of July (e.g., in July 2024, 1,923,491 California children participated in CalFresh).
Data Source: California Dept. of Social Services, CalFresh Data Dashboard (Nov. 2025).

Number of Participants in Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) Program: 2020

Locations	Number
California	513,479
Alameda County	13,597
Contra Costa County	8,520
Fresno County	28,913
Kern County	25,656
Los Angeles County	152,699
Orange County	31,570
Riverside County	37,431
Sacramento County	19,656
San Bernardino County	37,389
San Diego County	33,904
Santa Clara County	11,271

Definition: Number of families redeeming Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) food vouchers in the month of January (e.g., in January 2020, 513,479 California families redeemed WIC food vouchers).
Data Source: California Dept. of Public Health, California Women, Infants and Children Program Redemption by County (May 2021).

meals, 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 maternal and birth outcomes, and improve children's health in general.

How Children Are Faring

In 2024, fewer than 70% of children in California and U.S. households experienced full food sufficiency in the previous year—meaning their households could always afford both the quantity and quality of food to meet all members' needs. In California, more than 2.5 million children lived in households that couldn't always afford enough to eat or couldn't always afford the types of nutritious, wholesome food that household members should eat.

According to 2023 estimates, more than 1.4 million children statewide lived in a food insecure household—one without the money or other resources to provide enough food for everyone in the household. This translates to more than 1 in 6 children statewide, up from around 1 in 8 in 2020. At the county level, the proportion of children experiencing household food insecurity in 2023 ranged from fewer than 1 in 12 (Marin, San Mateo) to more than 1 in 4 (Imperial, Modoc).

The CalFresh (Food Stamps) supplemental nutrition program served nearly 5.5 million Californians, including nearly 2 million children, in July 2024. Compared with 10 years earlier, CalFresh participation in 2024 was up 22% for Californians of all ages but down 16% for Californians ages 0 to 17.

In January 2020, 513,479 California families redeemed Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) program healthy food vouchers, down from 585,256 in 2019.

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

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