Foster Care in California

What It Is
Kidsdata.org provides the following indicators of children and youth involved in the foster care system:

- Children ages 0-17 entering foster care for the first time, by age group, race/ethnicity, reason for removal from home, and type of foster care placement
- Children and youth ages 0-20 in foster care on July 1st, by age group, race/ethnicity, and type of placement
- The number of foster youth enrolled in public schools on the first Wednesday in October, along with the percentage of foster youth in the total student population
- The percentage of children in foster care who receive timely medical exams and timely dental exams

Why This Topic Is Important
Foster care is intended to provide temporary, safe living arrangements and therapeutic services for children who cannot remain safely at home because of risk for maltreatment or inadequate care. The U.S. foster care system aims to safely reunify children with their parents or secure another permanent home, e.g., through adoption; however, too often this goal is not achieved, especially for older youth and children with disabilities. Instead, many children spend years in foster homes or group homes, often moving many times.

Children in foster care are at increased risk for a variety of emotional, physical, behavioral, and academic problems, with outcomes generally worse for children in group homes. Recognizing this, advocates and policymakers have made efforts to prevent children from entering the system and to safely reduce the number of children living in foster care, particularly in group homes. While the number of children in foster care nationally has decreased since the 2000s, it has risen in recent years, and California continues to have the largest number of children entering the system each year. Further, children of color continue to be overrepresented in the foster care system; in California, for example, African American/black children make up 23% of foster children but only 6% of the general child population.

How Children Are Faring

Children Entering Foster Care for the First Time

Definition: Number of children ages 0-17 entering foster care for the first time, per 1,000 children (e.g., in 2018, 2.4 per 1,000 California children entered foster care for the first time).

Children in Foster Care, by Race/Ethnicity: 2018

Definition: Number of children and youth ages 0-20 in foster care on July 1, per 1,000 children/youth, by race/ethnicity (e.g., on July 1, 2018, 5.3 per 1,000 Hispanic/Latino children/youth in California were in foster care).
Foster Children with Timely Medical Exams: 2019; Showing Counties

**Definition:** Percentage of children ages 0-17 in foster care on March 31 receiving medical exams in accordance with Child Health and Disability Prevention Program periodicity schedules effective July 1, 2016 (e.g., among California children in foster care on March 31, 2019, 73.3% received timely medical exams).

**Data Source:** Webster, D., et al., California Child Welfare Indicators Project Reports. UC Berkeley Center for Social Services Research (Jul. 2019).

In 2018, 2.4 per 1,000 California children ages 0-17 entered foster care for the first time, a drop of more than 30% compared with twenty years earlier. Across time periods, infants consistently have higher rates of first entry into care than older children. Statewide, the rate of children under age 1 entering foster care for the first time in 2016-2018 (12.2 per 1,000) was more than three times the rate for children ages 1-2, nearly five times that for ages 3-5, and more than 6 times the rates for older groups. Among all children entering foster care for the first time in 2016-2018, 87% were removed from their families due to neglect, 7% due to physical abuse, and 2% due to sexual abuse.

The number of California children and youth ages 0-20 living in foster care on July 1, 2018 was 59,172—a rate of 5.3 per 1,000. Of these, 19,111 were placed in kinship care, 13,229 with foster family agencies, 7,452 in foster homes, and 6,147 in guardianship. At the county level, rates of children/youth in care ranged from 1.2 per 1,000 (Marin) to 18.8 per 1,000 (Trinity) among regions with data. In-care rates for African American/black and American Indian/Alaska Native youth statewide are substantially higher than rates for their peers in other groups—more than 20 children/youth in care per 1,000 in 2018, compared with 5.3 per 1,000 (Hispanic/Latino), 4.4 per 1,000 (white), and 1 per 1,000 (Asian/Pacific Islander).

Among California children under age 18 in foster care on March 31, 2019, 73% had received timely medical exams and 67% timely dental exams. Across counties with data, percentages ranged from 42% to 98% for timely medical exams and from 7% to 95% for timely dental exams.

**View references for this text and additional research on this topic:**
https://www.kidsdata.org/topic/4/foster-care/summary