Children's Nutrition in California

What It Is
Kidsdata.org offers the following nutrition-related indicators:

- Children ages 2-17 who drink one or more sodas or other sugar-sweetened beverages per day, who eat five or more servings of fruits and vegetables per day, and who eat fast food two or more times in the previous week.
- Students in grades 7, 9, 11, and non-traditional programs who ate breakfast in the previous day.
- School staff reports on the extent to which their school provides students with healthy food choices.

Why This Topic Is Important
Proper nutrition in childhood and adolescence promotes healthy growth and development. A nutritious diet over the life course can help reduce the risk of developing conditions such as dental cavities, high blood pressure, diabetes, obesity, heart disease, osteoporosis, and cancer.

Eating breakfast can promote proper nutrition. Children who eat breakfast have higher daily intakes of key vitamins and minerals and tend to make healthier food choices throughout the day. Eating a nutritious breakfast also is associated with improved mood, cognitive functioning, and school attendance.

Children in low-income households are at increased risk for food insecurity and poor nutrition, which can have long-term negative health consequences. For example, undernourishment can adversely affect children’s cognitive development, and consumption of unhealthful foods (e.g., fast food and sugar-sweetened beverages) is linked to weight gain and obesity.

How Children Are Faring
According to a 2015-2016 California survey, 40% of children and youth drank sugary beverages on a daily basis, with county-level figures ranging from 11% (Santa Cruz) to 62% (Merced and Napa) across regions with data. Sugary drink consumption also differed by age and race/ethnicity. For example, among youth ages 12-17, 58% reported drinking at least one sugar-sweetened beverage in the previous day, while parent reports for younger children were much lower, at 35% for ages 6-11, and 22% for ages 2-5. Among racial/ethnic groups with...
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade Level</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Male</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>7th Grade</td>
<td>67.7%</td>
<td>75.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9th Grade</td>
<td>58.0%</td>
<td>68.2%</td>
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<tr>
<td>11th Grade</td>
<td>58.1%</td>
<td>62.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Traditional</td>
<td>45.0%</td>
<td>45.6%</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**Definition:** Estimated percentage of public school students in grades 7, 9, 11, and non-traditional programs who ate breakfast in the previous day, by gender and grade level (e.g., in 2015-2017, an estimated 58% of female 9th graders in California had eaten breakfast in the previous day).

**Data Source:** WestEd, California Healthy Kids Survey (CHKS) and Biennial State CHKS, California Dept. of Education (Mar. 2019).

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**Children Who Ate Fast Food at Least Twice in the Previous Week, by Age Group California**

**Definition:** Estimated percentage of children ages 2-17 who ate fast food two or more times in the previous week, by age group (e.g., in 2015-2016, an estimated 39.2% of California children ages 2-11 ate fast food two or more times in the past week).

**Data Source:** UCLA Center for Health Policy Research, California Health Interview Survey (Mar. 2018).

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According to the same survey, more than one-third (35%) of children ages 2-11 ate five or more servings of fruits and vegetables (excluding juice and fried potatoes) daily, compared to about a quarter (26%) of youth ages 12-17. The survey also found that 43% of children and youth ages 2-17 ate fast food two or more times in the preceding week, similar to previous years. Among counties with data, estimates of children and youth consuming fast food at least twice weekly ranged from 7% (Marin) to 62% (San Benito) in 2015-2016.

According to 2015-2017 estimates, 72% of California 7th graders, 63% of 9th graders, and 60% of 11th graders had eaten breakfast in the previous day. Across grade levels statewide, boys were more likely than girls to report having breakfast. By comparison, only 45% of girls and 46% of boys in non-traditional programs had eaten breakfast in the past day. In general, estimates of eating breakfast were lowest for students with low levels of school connectedness and those whose parents did not finish high school (52% and 56%, respectively), and increased as levels of school connectedness and parent education improved. In 2015-2017, around half of gay, lesbian, and bisexual students in California ate breakfast in the previous day, compared with about two-thirds of students in other groups.

During the same period, 31% of responses by elementary school staff in California indicated strong agreement that their school provided students with healthy food choices. Strong agreement was lowest among responses by high school staff (21%), followed by middle school (24%) and non-traditional school staff (25%).

**View references for this text and additional research on this topic:**
https://www.kidsdata.org/topic/57/nutrition/summary