

# Food Insecurity Among Children: A Look at Baltimore City

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POLICY ACTION BRIEF CHILDREN'S HealthWatch

CHILDREN'S HEALTH WATCH & BALTIMORE CITY HEALTH DEPARTMENT

## WHAT IS FOOD INSECURITY?

**Food insecurity:** When people lack resources to access enough safe and nutritious food to maintain a healthy lifestyle. Food insecurity is an economic and social condition that causes hunger, a physical condition.

## HOW IS FOOD INSECURITY MEASURED?

Children's HealthWatch researchers developed a two question screen to identify food insecurity.<sup>1</sup> Families that respond *often* or *sometimes true* to either question are at risk for food insecurity.

1) Within the past 12 months we worried whether our food would run out before we got money to buy more.  
(Often true, sometimes true, never true)

2) Within the past 12 months the food we bought just didn't last and we didn't have money to get more.  
(Often true, sometimes true, never true)

## FOOD ASSISTANCE IN BALTIMORE CITY:

- 34% of children in Baltimore live in households receiving SNAP/food stamps and/or cash assistance
- 83% of Baltimore City Public School students are eligible for free or reduced price meals
- 25% of Baltimore residents received SNAP/food stamps in Sept 2009

## WHAT CAUSES FOOD INSECURITY?

**Access:** Many low-income Baltimore neighborhoods have few healthy food choices. Families may live far from grocery stores and rely on corner stores that carry more expensive, less varied options.

**Poverty/ Resource constraints:** Low-income households struggle to pay for all their necessary expenses. At the Maryland Food Bank:

- 32% of clients reported having to choose between paying for food or utilities/heating.
- 24% had to choose between food and medical expenses.

**Service barriers:** Families face multiple barriers to utilizing services like WIC and SNAP (Food Stamps).

- Uncertain eligibility
- Stigma
- Difficulty in applying for and maintaining benefits
- Inadequate transportation

## WHO IS FOOD INSECURE?

Food insecurity disproportionately affects:

- Low-income families with children
- Black or Hispanic households
- Single-parent households

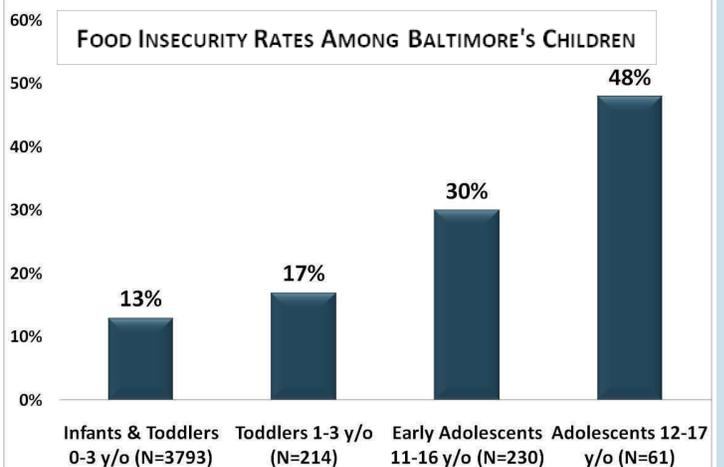
## HOW DOES FOOD INSECURITY AFFECT CHILDREN?

**Infants & Toddlers:** Children (ages 0-3) living in food insecure households are more likely to:

- Be hospitalized
- Be in fair or poor health
- Experience developmental delays

**School-Age Children:** Children (ages 6-16) living in families with insufficient food are more likely to:

- Repeat a grade
- Miss school
- Score lower in arithmetic
- Have behavioral problems



These data come from University of Maryland studies assessing rates of food insecurity in different low-income populations. While they are not representative of the city as a whole, the samples here show that food insecurity is a problem for children of all ages.

- Social services may help alleviate the negative effects of food insecurity.
- Service providers can help families make ends meet and avoid food insecurity by helping them find resources.

See the reverse side for a list of services and programs available to children at different ages and their families.



# Resources and Initiatives for Families and Children

## INFANTS AND TODDLERS (0-4 YEARS OLD):

### Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC):

<http://fha.maryland.gov/wic> or call 1-800-242-4WIC

Provides low-income pregnant and breastfeeding women and children ages 0-5 with supplemental food. Families receive vouchers for specific items (i.e. milk, fruits, vegetables).

### Head Start/Early Head Start: Call 410-396-7414

[http://www.md-hsa.org/head\\_start\\_programs\\_in\\_md](http://www.md-hsa.org/head_start_programs_in_md)

Provides services, including early childhood education; family-support; health, nutrition and parenting education.

### Maternal and Infant Nursing Program

(Bureau of Infant and Maternal Care): Call 410-396-9404

<http://www.baltimorehealth.org/maternalandinfant.html>

Provides case management, including nutrition and food-related referrals, for pregnant and postpartum women.

### Park Heights Family Support Center

4330 D Pimlico Rd or call 410-578-0244 for information about free services for pregnant women and families with children ages 0-3.

## CHILDREN (5-18 YEARS OLD):

**Universal Free Breakfast:** Baltimore City Public Schools offer free breakfast to **ALL** students.

### National School Lunch Program (NSL):

Call 410-767-0199 for more information.

≤130% of the poverty line = **FREE** lunch

130- 185% of the poverty line = **REDUCED** price lunch

**After-School Meal Program:** check with individual schools to see if they have a program yet.

[www.marylandpublicschools.org/MSDE/programs/schoolnutrition](http://www.marylandpublicschools.org/MSDE/programs/schoolnutrition)

### Summer Food Service Program (SFSP):

[www.mdsummermeals.org](http://www.mdsummermeals.org) or call 877-731-9300 to find a summer meal site in your neighborhood.

**School-based Gardens :** provides students hands-on nutritional education

Great Kids Farm: [www.greatkidsfarm.org](http://www.greatkidsfarm.org)

Real Food Farm: [www.real-food-farm.org](http://www.real-food-farm.org)

## FAMILIES:

- **Call 211 (United Way):** referrals to services and assistance
- **Baltimore City Health Department: Hungry In Baltimore:** links to food-related resources in Baltimore City  
<http://www.baltimorehealth.org/hungryinbaltimore.html>
- **Maryland Food Supplement Program (FSP)/Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP):** known commonly as food stamps, FSP provides families ≤130% of the poverty line with a monthly benefit for food purchases. Apply online at— [www.marylandsail.org](http://www.marylandsail.org) OR call **443-378-4600**
- **Temporary Cash Assistance (TCA):** cash assistance for struggling families based on eligibility guidelines. Apply online at— [www.marylandsail.org](http://www.marylandsail.org) OR call **443-423-6300**
- **Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC):** tax credit for low-income families with children. Find a place to file taxes for free and check eligibility at <http://baltimore.earnbenefits.org> OR call **443-692-9487**
- **Maryland Energy Assistance Program (MEAP):** help with utility and energy costs for low-income households  
<http://www.dhr.maryland.gov/ohep/index.php> OR call **410-396-5555**
- **Medicaid/Medical Assistance:** medical coverage for low-income families  
<http://www.dhr.maryland.gov/fiapprograms/medical.php#medi> OR call **443-423-6100**
- **Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP):** reimburses day care providers and after-school programs for nutritious meals and snacks served to low-income children  
<http://www.fns.usda.gov/cnd/care/> OR call **410-767-0199**
- **Baltimarkets:** buy & pick up groceries at library locations. Cash, credit/debit, check, and EBT are all accepted. Enoch Pratt Free Library (Orleans Street Branch) 1303 Orleans Street: order Wednesday 11am-2pm, (Washington Village Branch) 856 Washington Boulevard: order Monday 12pm-3pm. Go to <http://baltimarket.org/> to learn more.

## WORKS CITED AND FURTHER READING

<sup>1</sup>Hager, E. et. al. *Pediatrics*. 2010; 126, 26-32.

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American Community Survey, 2005-2009, [www.census.gov/acs/www](http://www.census.gov/acs/www)

Baltimore City Public Schools, [www.baltimorecityschools.org](http://www.baltimorecityschools.org)

Children's HealthWatch, [www.childrenshealthwatch.org](http://www.childrenshealthwatch.org)

Maryland Department of Education, [www.marylandpublicschools.org](http://www.marylandpublicschools.org)

Maryland Food Bank, [www.mdfoodbank.org](http://www.mdfoodbank.org)

Maryland Hunger Solutions, [www.mdhungersolutions.org](http://www.mdhungersolutions.org)

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