



MORE THAN ONE IN FIVE AMERICANS IS FOOD INSECURE. IT'S EVEN WORSE FOR KIDS.



The images and anecdotes are disturbing and revealing: In [San Antonio](#), drone photos show what appears to be an enormous parking lot but is actually more than 10,000 people waiting in lines for a socially distanced food pantry that fed 50,000 people in a single day. In [Central Florida](#), Disney fans from around the world have raised money to help support food banks that feed the many park employees who are out of work. And in [California](#), in early October, an alliance of 36 food banks announced the packaging of the 100 millionth meal served during the pandemic.

“We’ve never experienced food insecurity at this level since we’ve been tracking the data for the last 20 years,” NEPC Fellow Diane Whitmore Schanzenbach, Director of the Institute for Policy Research at Northwestern University, [told Minnesota Public Radio](#) last month.

As bleak as things look for adults in need, they are even worse for children.

In July, [29 percent](#) of American adults with children reported food insecurity, compared to 23 percent for adults generally. Families with children typically experience higher rates of food insecurity—even when the world is not in the midst of a pandemic.

Food insecurity rates also typically vary by race. Among respondents with children, in October, the rates were 39 percent for Blacks, 36 percent for Hispanics, and 21 percent for Whites.

Between March and April of 2020, food insecurity skyrocketed, due to spikes in unemployment and loss of access to school meals, according to a report by Schanzenbach and Abigail Pitts. They found that 79 percent of families with children earning less than \$20,000 annually, and 60 percent of those earning from \$20,000 to \$39,999, experienced food insecurity in April.

Food insecurity does not necessarily mean that children are hungry. For example, families may be considered food insecure if they are worried their food will run out before they could afford to buy more, even if they still have enough to eat. However, the “food insecure” status is still correlated with **long-term, negative impacts** on children’s cognitive development, health, and behavior.

Schools have been stepping up, making **herculean efforts** to provide meals to families while campuses are closed. And Congress’s Pandemic EBT program distributed money for groceries to more than half the nation’s schoolchildren, who received benefits worth about \$120 per student per month.

This approach also has the benefit of minimizing exposure to the virus. “It’s not an extra trip,” Schanzenbach **told CNN**. “It just means that on the trips you take to the grocery store, you get more money to spend.”

The program was successful, leading to a 30 percent decline in the share of children not getting enough to eat, in the week after the funds were distributed, **according to** The Hamilton Project, an economic policy initiative of the Brookings Institution. However, despite being reauthorized by Congress for this academic year, its future **is in question**.

Schanzenbach is continuing to track rates of food insecurity for families with and without children, both for academic research purposes and with a **public facing app** powered by Census data.

“It’s crucially important to understand the economic challenges families are facing, so that we can hopefully devise effective policy solutions,” Schanzenbach told us.

NEPC Resources on Social Context of Education

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