



Food Insecurity

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BACKGROUND

The US Department of Agriculture (USDA) defines food insecurity as a lack of consistent access to enough food for an active, healthy life (1). It is an issue that impacts every community in the US, and refers to a lack of available financial resources for food at the level of the household. The USDA estimated that 13% of the overall population and 18% of children in the United States lived in food-insecure households in 2015. That means 42 million individuals and 13 million children in the US lived in a home without consistent access to adequate food (2). Inadequate food intake in children is associated with a number of serious mental, physical, and behavior deficits. Food insecurity contributes to increased hospitalizations, poor health, iron deficiency, developmental risk, and behavior problems like aggression, anxiety, and attention deficit disorder (3).

Children who are food-insecure are also at a greater risk for obesity. The unpredictable availability of food can lead to overeating, lower diet quality, and less variety (4). Periods of restriction or skipped meals due to a lack of funds lead individuals to cycle through deprivation and overindulgence. Lower income individuals tend to live in neighborhoods with fewer grocery stores and fewer healthy food options. More than 29 million individuals in the US live in 'food deserts.' Their neighborhoods tend to have cheaper food options available like fast food and processed foods that have a lower nutritional value and are calorie-dense with added sugar and fats (5). 'Food deserts' do not have a supermarket or supercenter within a mile of their home if they live in an urban area or within 10 miles of their home if they live in a rural area (5). Food insecure families often resort to these lower-cost, calorically-dense, food as diet quality is sacrificed to quantity and availability. Children in food-insecure households consume fewer fruits, dark green vegetables, grains, yogurt, nuts, seeds, and dried beans and pea, but more sugar and eggs than their peers in food-secure households, leading to higher cholesterol

levels, and a less balanced diet (3).

HAMPTON ROADS

According to Feeding America, in the state of Virginia, about 11.2% of individuals are food-insecure (6). Of the 1.87 million children (less than 18 years of age) in the state, about 14.4% are food insecure. This means that there are over a quarter of a million children in the state that lack access to enough food for an active healthy life. Of these 268,670 food-insecure children in Virginia, only 67% fall in the poverty bracket that would make their family income-eligible for federal nutrition assistance. This means almost 100,000 children in Virginia not only lack access to enough food, but they do not qualify for federal assistance either.

In the counties of Chesapeake, Norfolk, Portsmouth, and Virginia Beach, there are over 35,000 children that were food-insecure in 2015 (6). That is about 15% of the children in the South Hampton Roads community. Norfolk and Portsmouth’s percentages are both 4% greater than the state average at 18.5%. While Virginia Beach had the lowest percentage of children in South Hampton Roads that were food-insecure (13.4%), they also had the greatest number (13,910 food-insecure children). Chesapeake had the highest percentage of children who were food-insecure and not income-eligible for federal nutrition assistance in South Hampton Roads (40%). Food insecurity is prevalent in the South Hampton Roads community, and does not appear to be an issue that will be disappearing anytime soon. It is not something that is isolated in dire poverty, but affects a variety of families in the local community. Where there is federal assistance, it is limited, and over a third of the children in the South Hampton Roads community that need it are ineligible to receive it.

COUNTY	Food insecurity rate (full population)	Population under 18 years old	<i>Food Insecurity in 2015</i>			
			Child food insecurity rate	Estimated number food insecure children (rounded)	Food insecure children likely income-eligible for federal nutrition assistance	Food insecure children likely NOT income-eligible for federal nutrition assistance
Chesapeake	11.8%	56,957	13.5%	7,700	60%	40%
Norfolk	19.3%	49,893	18.5%	9,240	75%	26%
Portsmouth	19.8%	22,626	18.5%	4,180	71%	29%
Virginia Beach	10.5%	103,435	13.4%	13,910	65%	35%
SOUTH HR TOTAL	--	232,911	15.0%	35,030	67%	33%
STATE TOTAL	11.2%	1,869,814	14.4%	268,670	64%	36%

RESOURCES

1. <https://hungerandhealth.feedingamerica.org/understand-food-insecurity/>
2. <http://www.feedingamerica.org/hunger-in-america/our-research/map-the-meal-gap/2015/2015-mapthemealgap-one-pager.pdf>
3. <http://www.apa.org/pi/ses/resources/indicator/2012/06/household-food-insecurities.aspx>
4. <https://www.childtrends.org/indicators/food-insecurity/>
5. <http://stateofobesity.org/food-insecurity/>
6. http://www.feedingamerica.org/hunger-in-america/our-research/map-the-meal-gap/2015/MMG_AllCounties_CDs_CFI_2015_2/VA_AllCounties_CDs_CFI_2015.pdf