

UNPACKING FOOD INSECURITY

Many children do not know when they will eat their next meal or where it will come from. Some go without food on a daily basis, especially when school is not in session and without access to school breakfast and lunch. The physical and mental stress of not having enough food can greatly affect a student's ability to concentrate and focus in school. It can also affect a child's physical health and ability to learn, leading to decreased academic success.

Children may not understand or connect their physical ailments with a lack of food access and intake. Signs of hunger can include stomach growling or pain, low energy, shakiness, headaches and problems focusing.

DEFINITIONS:

Food Insecurity: not having enough food at all times to live a healthy, active lifestyle

Food Bank: the storehouse for millions of pounds of food and other products that go out to the community; provides emergent resources; accepts donations from local organizations/businesses

Food Pantry: a self-governing distribution center that usually provides food to their clients on a once-a-month basis

DATA



1 in 9 Nebraska households do not know where their next meal will come from



16.7% of Nebraska children are food insecure



The more kids there are in a home, the greater the chance of being food insecure

Source: Kids Count in Nebraska Report, 2020



84% of households served by Feeding America buy the cheapest food possible – instead of healthy food – to provide enough to eat



12.3% of all people are food insecure

Children Facing Hunger May Struggle in School – and Beyond. They are More Likely to:



Repeat a grade in elementary school



Experience developmental impairments in areas like language and motor skills



Have more social and behavioral problems

Source: Feeding America

HEALTH OFFICE CONSIDERATIONS

It is common to see students at the beginning of the day with signs and symptoms of hunger. Consider the following interventions to assist:

- Advocate for an all-student inclusive breakfast program in your school – preferably in-classroom breakfast
- Consider grab and go breakfast from the health office and the utilization of a school's fresh fruit and vegetable program (offered to schools with high needs) to address food insecurity
- Work with the food services manager and leadership to have healthy food choices in the health office for students who are hungry
- Educate yourself on the signs and symptoms of hunger which may include behavioral issues such as irritability, difficulty concentrating, over eating at meal times, or hoarding food
 - Headaches and stomach aches are also common, and students often do not recognize these symptoms as being directly related to a lack of food
- Keep a list of local and state resources for families who need food assistance
- Advocate for your school to partner with a community organization, local church or sister school to host a food drive (the sister school is typically a school from an upper income neighborhood in the same or near-by city)

RESOURCES:

LOCAL

Local health departments - dhhs.ne.gov/Pages/Local-Health-Departments.aspx

Local food pantries - foodbankheartland.org/get-food/find-food-locations-now

Food Bank of Lincoln - www.lincolnfoodbank.org

STATE

Food Bank of the Heartland - foodbankheartland.org

SNAP Outreach - dhhs.ne.gov/Pages/SNAP.aspx or 1-855-444-5556

Nebraska Department of Education Nutrition Services

• School Lunch and Breakfast Program - www.education.ne.gov/ns/nslp

• Summer Feeding Program - www.education.ne.gov/ns/sfsp

Nebraska Appleseed - neappleseed.org/covid19resources

NATIONAL

Feeding America - www.feedingamerica.org

This material was developed as a compliment to the Project ECHO School Health series on Social Determinants of Health, Session 6: Unpacking Food Insecurity for Students and Families, presented by Eric Savaiano, Shelly Mann and Kayte Partch, on March 31, 2021. Additional resources can be found here: www.childrensomaha.org/projectecho