



THE LONGEST SUMMER

CHILDHOOD HUNGER IN THE WAKE OF THE CORONAVIRUS

JULY 2020



Ever since the coronavirus has been going on, yes, I've had a hard time putting food on the table. I'm trying to decide what bills to pay first and what medications I should get. **Since school has been closed, my kids don't eat every day.**

JAMES, FATHER, GEORGIA

Before the pandemic, summer was already a hard time for families struggling to feed their kids, with schools closed and school meals gone. This year, schools closed in March, leaving many children without reliable daily meals for months on end. In the wake of COVID-19, more American families are waiting in line at food banks and rationing meals for their kids.

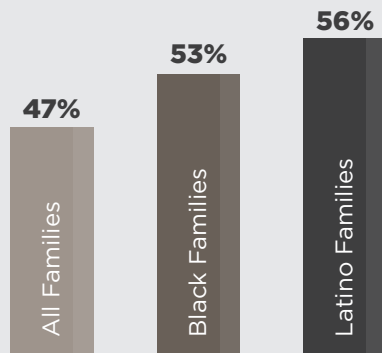
This report gives new insight into the pandemic's impact on children—how they're coping and what new sacrifices their families are forced to make. The story is a bleak one—even more so for Black and Latino children.

But there is a thin ray of light. More Americans are newly aware of just how many families were living on the edge before the pandemic—and how many children struggle with hunger. And more Americans are willing to invest in a stronger safety net to feed them. It's a safety net we must strengthen, for meals they cannot afford to miss.

MORE KIDS FACING HUNGER

During the COVID-19 pandemic, 47% of American families are living with hunger.

The numbers are worse among Black families (53%) and Latino families (56%).



AMERICAN FAMILIES ARE LIVING WITH HUNGER

Over the past decade we made real progress in the fight against childhood hunger. But COVID-19 has set us back. Some organizations have reported data showing 1 in 4 households with children facing hunger¹ and our new research shows an even higher figure. This represents a huge leap from the 1 in 7 reported in September 2019.²

So drastic a change in such a short time period shows that many families were one lost job or stalled school meal program away from hunger.



It's all so uncertain right now, the uncertainty is worrying to me. Where the food is going to come from. Food is in short supply, money is in short supply. **Even just talking about it now is making my chest hurt.**

REBECCA, MOTHER, OREGON

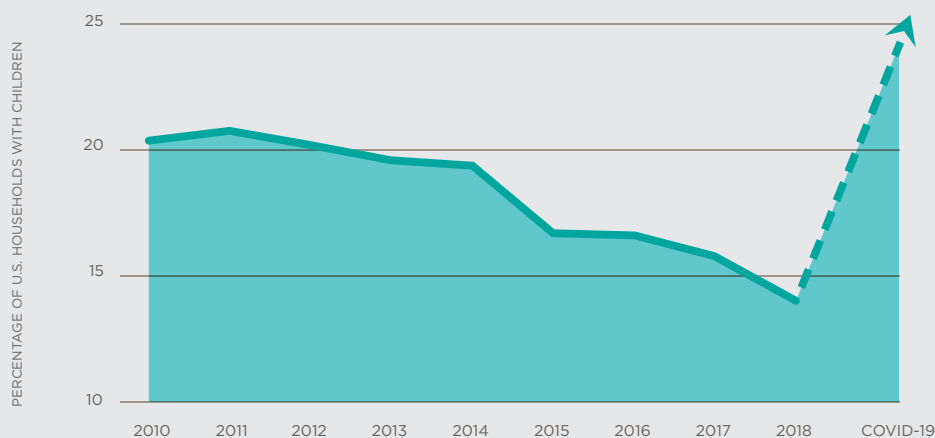
When you're in a tough situation like this you basically go into survival mode and go back to the basics. How am I going to keep a roof over my son's head and how am I going to keep food on our table?

KYLE, FATHER, NEW YORK

¹ Urban Institute (2020). <https://www.urban.org/urban-wire/many-families-are-struggling-put-food-table-we-have-do-more>

² United States Department of Agriculture (2019). <https://www.ers.usda.gov/webdocs/publications/94849/err-270.pdf?v=3460.8>

CHILDHOOD HUNGER SINCE 2010 AND THE COVID-19 SPIKE



Source: USDA and Urban Institute

During the pandemic, many struggling families have been forced to make new sacrifices to get by.

39%

are skipping certain bills more often in order to make sure they have food.

“During this coronavirus, I’ve had zero income, I’m definitely going to eat and make sure my kid can eat, over paying the rent. Yeah, we didn’t pay the rent. And that wasn’t easy because they had to evict us, so we would have a couple months before the eviction kicked in. If I had paid the rent, then what?”

REBECCA, MOTHER, OREGON

41%

are eating more fast food/ pre-packaged food.

“That’s one thing I think people don’t realize, when you’re short on money you buy the cheapest possible food.”

REBECCA, MOTHER, OREGON

51%

of parents are skipping meals or limiting the amount everybody eats more often as a result of the crisis.

“The adults eat less food to make sure that the kids have food. We’re trying to do pretty much everything possible.”

MELYSSA, MOTHER, NEW YORK

66%

are making more meals with limited options.

“I have to think how to eliminate as many unnecessary items as possible. Like picking frozen food over fresh. And I use coupons more than I ever used to.”

SUMMER, MOTHER, UTAH



We try to keep that part from them. We want them to be innocent. We want them to not have to worry about if we have food on the table, if they're gonna be able to eat.

MELYSSA, MOTHER, NEW YORK

CHILDREN ON BOTH SIDES OF THE ECONOMIC DIVIDE

Even though most parents try to shield them, many kids whose families are struggling are experiencing the pandemic differently than kids from more affluent families.

Children **NOT FACING HUNGER** are asking their parents...

When they will be able to see their friends*

*9% more than kids facing hunger.

When things will get back to normal*

*8% more than kids facing hunger.

When school will start*

*14% more than kids facing hunger.

While children **FACING HUNGER** are asking...

Whether their parents will get their jobs back*

*14% more than kids not facing hunger.

Whether their family has enough food*

*17% more than kids not facing hunger.

About not being able to sleep at night*

*9% more than kids not facing hunger.

FIRST TIME AT A FOOD BANK



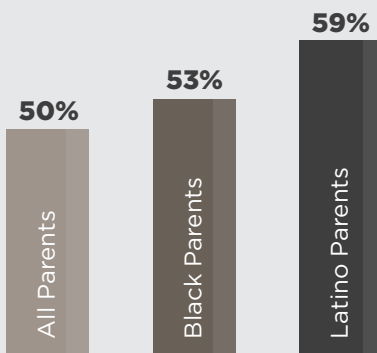
I never thought I would have this problem or even be worried about it.

JAMES, FATHER, GEORGIA

As the pandemic closed businesses across the country and unemployment skyrocketed, American families who were just keeping their heads above water before are now struggling to make ends meet and feed their children.

Half of working parents have reported losing their jobs or had their hours reduced because of COVID-19.

Some face even starker rates of job loss, such as Black parents (53%) and Latino parents (59%).



**PARENTS REPORTING JOB LOSS
OR REDUCED HOURS**

“Before the pandemic, I never had to worry about putting food on the table for my family. We were not a rich family. We were just regular, middle class. We had a little bit saved. Pretty much, just like some other people, live paycheck to paycheck. But we never worried about food. We never worried that we’d be in the situation that we’re in now.”

MELYSSA, MOTHER, NEW YORK

“My husband was very ashamed of us being a WIC family, so we couldn’t grocery shop at the store where he worked and I couldn’t shop at any of the stores where people he knew worked. To us, going on WIC was an admission of failure. And it speaks to a part of American society that we don’t really address enough when we talk about issues of hunger, child hunger and the inability to get food—this deeply-rooted belief that morality and financial success are intertwined. That if one is getting formula for their baby via WIC, they must have had a fundamental failing.”

MICHELLE, MOTHER, WASHINGTON

ESSENTIAL WORKERS STRUGGLING TO GET BY

Though this pandemic has made clear how much “essential workers” contribute to society, families working in healthcare, food service, public works and other essential industries³ are among the hardest hit by the pandemic.

74% of food insecure parents who are still working are in essential industries.

63%

have had hours reduced because of COVID-19.

56%

think it’s likely they’ll lose their jobs as a result of COVID-19.

27%

earn less than \$40,000.

87%

were struggling with hunger in the 12 months before the pandemic.



Before COVID-19, even though we struggled financially, I wasn’t too worried about having enough food on the table for our family. I used to love grocery shopping. But now I have anxiety over it.

SUMMER, MOTHER, UTAH

³Essential industries defined as any of the following: healthcare, public health and veterinary services; law enforcement, public safety and emergency response; food, food service/restaurants, and/or agriculture; public works, utilities and infrastructure; transportation and logistics; communications and information technology; manufacturing and production; financial services; government or defense; retail (any type of retailer, including grocery stores/supermarkets); home delivery from local restaurants, supermarkets, or other types of stores; education and childcare.



There are more families turning to us right now than ever before. We aren't seeing as many donations. Grocery stores are maxed out. We've had to make more purchases to stock our warehouse.

JENNA UMBRIAC,
MANNA FOOD CENTER,
GAITHERSBURG, MARYLAND

Moms and dads have lost jobs. The need was great already, but now it's just gone through the roof. Our families are struggling right now.

JOHN SASAKI,
OAKLAND UNIFIED
SCHOOL DISTRICT

A VISIBLE CRISIS

Childhood hunger was a crisis in the United States before COVID-19. The pandemic has worsened that crisis, and also made it visible in new ways.

85% of families currently living with hunger were dealing with the same hunger in the year before the pandemic.

The majority of parents we surveyed said that COVID-19 made them realize more families struggle with hunger in their communities than they knew. We asked them what changed their minds.

53%

of parents say it was the fact that schools made it a point to keep making meals available even after they closed down.

62%

of parents saw news stories about increased use of food pantries or food pantries running out of food.



NOW AMERICANS KNOW: SCHOOLS FEED KIDS

Earlier this year, as schools across the country closed their doors, school staff had to change their operations, sometimes literally overnight. For the rest of the academic year, schools worked overtime to feed kids, many of them shifting to drive-thru or walk-up services, as well as delivering meals using school buses and partnerships with community groups.

70% of parents said COVID-19 made them realize that more kids rely on school meals than they were previously aware of.

Just as seeing long lines at food banks has made more Americans aware of the depth of food insecurity in this country, seeing school staff move heaven and earth to stay open and keep feeding kids has helped Americans realize how critical school meals programs are for millions of children in the United States.

“Before the crisis happened, my daughter did not qualify for free lunch. I got an email from the school saying you can apply for the school lunch program if your status has changed. So now she qualifies for free lunch. We’ve been going every day and getting the free food from the school, that’s been a huge help.”

REBECCA, MOTHER, OREGON

“With all that’s going on, everyone needs to see the amazing impact a simple sack lunch has on a hungry child. It brings a smile, and it brings hope.”

DOUGLAS HOFFMAN,
HITCHCOCK INDEPENDENT
SCHOOL DISTRICT, TEXAS

LIGHT IN DARK DAYS

“Me and my wife had no idea where income was going to come from, so that was really rough. We had to apply for SNAP because I wasn’t working, and that was a godsend. That allowed us to eat. That was what SNAP did for us. SNAP is a really important program for families that are struggling.”

JUSTIN, FATHER, TEXAS

“I’d have fifty bucks to spend on groceries for a family, so I wouldn’t buy healthy greens and fresh fruit. I might buy one tomato. But mainly I would get rice and pasta. Once we started getting SNAP, I started buying a lot more fruit and vegetables.”

REBECCA, MOTHER, OREGON

These data and stories paint a grim picture; the pandemic has been catastrophic for many American families. **But we believe this crisis can be the moment when we end childhood hunger in America.**

With their eyes opened to the depth of childhood hunger in our country by COVID-19, more Americans are willing to support programs that can solve it.

- **Rising support for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP).** We know that SNAP—a federal program that provides direct help for families to purchase food—is one of the most effective ways we can feed kids. Since COVID-19, 76% of Americans believe SNAP funding should be maintained or increased.
- **Rising support for food programs.** 39% of Americans are more supportive of SNAP and federal school meal programs than they were before COVID-19.
- **More Americans want to invest in feeding kids.** Since COVID-19, 55% of Americans think there should be more federal funding to ensure children have access to food.

The Congressional Budget Office estimates it may take a decade to fully recover from the impact of the pandemic, and unemployment is likely to remain high through next year. And it’s hard to say what “back-to-school” will look like for children in different communities.

But we know what works when it comes to feeding kids:

- **Stronger school meals programs.** The pandemic has shown how critical schools are to feeding kids. They will need more support as they reopen and explore new ways to reach students, whether that's meals delivery or alternatives to how traditional school meals like lunch are served.

- » **Breakfast & dinner at school.** In districts across the country, we've seen how making breakfast available during the regular school day helps feed far more students than the traditional method of serving breakfast in the cafeteria before school begins. We've also seen how afterschool meals programs have become a critical way to reach more children in need.

- » **More help for low-income communities.** Schools are also expanding access to school meals by making them free to all students through programs such as the Community Eligibility Program, which lets schools in low-income neighborhoods serve meals at no cost to every student without making parents apply.

- **Better ways to feed kids in the summer.** Many kids depend on school meals—meals that disappear during the summer. We've long known that our current patchwork approach to summer meals isn't effective. During the pandemic, many communities have adopted new approaches to feeding children during the summer—approaches that show us how we could do better.

- » **Less restrictive rules.** Summer meals programs, funded by the USDA and run by school districts and local organizations, help feed children when schools are

closed. In past years, students had to eat these meals together at the site each day, which limited participation. During the pandemic, with temporary waivers to the usual rules, parents have been able to pick up meals that last several days or have meals delivered. This has been invaluable—both for safety and to feed kids in rural and hard-to-reach areas.

- » **Direct benefits.** During the pandemic, federal and state governments approved payments to parents whose children qualified for free or reduced-price meals at schools. Those benefits are a far more effective way to feed children—during this crisis and in the future. (During the crisis, families are relying on Pandemic Electronic Benefits Transfer, or P-EBT, but a similar program - Summer EBT - has also proven to be effective at reducing hunger in the summer and should be expanded.)

- **A safety net for kids.** The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) is one of the most effective ways to feed hungry children. Today, over 20 million kids rely on SNAP for the food they need. During the pandemic, No Kid Hungry and other organizations have pushed Congress to strengthen SNAP—expanding benefits and making it more flexible, like allowing parents to buy groceries online.

THIS CRISIS CAN BE THE MOMENT WHEN WE END CHILDHOOD HUNGER IN AMERICA.

More eyes—and hearts—are open than ever before. Otherwise the problem will worsen, even as we recover from the pandemic.

NOW IS THE TIME TO HELP AMERICA'S KIDS.

Research Methodology

In partnership with No Kid Hungry, Marketing for Change led quantitative and qualitative phases of research to explore child and family hunger in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Partnering with YouGov, a leading public opinion and data analytics firm working on behalf of Marketing for Change for No Kid Hungry, we conducted a national omnibus survey, a national survey of parents with school-aged children (ages 5-17) and follow up interviews and ethnographic research with select survey participants.

- The national omnibus survey was conducted with 1,153 US adults (aged 18+) fielded between May 4, 2020 and May 5, 2020. To ensure proper demographic representation of the sample, final data were weighted and are representative of all US adults (ages 18+).
- The nationally representative parent survey was conducted with 1,246 parents of school-aged children (ages 5-17) fielded between May 1, 2020 and May 25, 2020. To ensure proper demographic representation of the sample, final data were weighted according to the following benchmark distributions of parents of children ages 5-17 from the 2017 Current Population Survey (CPS) from the U.S. Census Bureau: age, gender, educational status, and household income within reason.
- Families “living with hunger” were defined as those parents who answered sometimes or often true to either of the following statements: ‘The food that we bought just didn’t last, and we didn’t have money to get more.’ or “We worried whether our food would run out before we got money to buy more.”
- An initial fifteen participants were recruited from the parent survey to conduct a follow-up 30-minute video screening interview. Nine of the fifteen parents went on to complete a 7-day video ethnography, documenting their experience during the time of COVID-19.
- All figures, unless otherwise stated, are from YouGov Plc.

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