

Poverty rate still high among US children, report says

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Almost one-quarter live in low-income homes, which experts say affects their health and education.

(HealthDay)—Poverty rates remain high among children in the United States and continue to affect their health, education and safety, a new federal report shows.

"Nearly a quarter of [children](#) in the United States are living in poverty. That's unacceptably high," said Dr. Thomas McInerney, president of the American Academy of Pediatrics. "We know that children who live in poverty have poorer nutritional status and poorer health status. They are not well set up to enter kindergarten, they are behind in their learning skills and so forth."

Unfortunately, the [report](#) shows that more children than ever are living in poverty: Twenty-two percent of those younger than 18 were living in

low-income circumstances in 2011, up from 16 percent a decade earlier.

The poverty rate is particularly high among [minority populations](#), the report found. By 2050, about half of the American population under the age of 17 will be composed of children who are Hispanic, Asian or of two or more races, the report authors added.

"Right now, 49.9 percent of all kids under 5 are any group other than non-Hispanic white alone," said Ben Bolender, a demographer for the U.S. Census Bureau. "The proportion has been increasing, and we would expect to cross the 50 percent mark in the next few years for that age range. It really highlights our changing diversity in the country."

The report found that many troubling issues linked to childhood poverty have either remained static or increased over the past few years:

- The percentage of children living in housing that is either inadequate or too expensive for household budgets rose slightly, from 45 percent in 2009 to 46 percent in 2011.
- Kindergarten reading and [math scores](#) are lower for children in households with incomes either below the federal poverty level or at 100 to 199 percent of the [federal poverty level](#).
- About 64 percent of children lived in a two-parent household in 2012, down from 77 percent in 1980.
- The quality of children's diets remains inadequate, reaching on average only half the dietary guidelines recommended by the U.S. Department of Agriculture.
- About 22 percent of all children live in homes that are food-insecure, up from 17 percent in 2007.

Poverty has a direct effect on a child's nutrition, said Kristi King, a spokeswoman for the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics and a dietitian at Texas Children's Hospital in Houston.

"If the families don't have the money or the access to purchase the types of foods they need, that could play a large part in children's poor intake," King explained. "As Americans, we need to look after our own and we need to make sure every child gets the food they need so they can grow up to be healthy individuals ready to take over in 20 years."

These trends have prompted the American Academy of Pediatrics to adopt childhood poverty as one of its major agenda items in the coming years, McInerny said.

He noted that the United Kingdom has been able to slash its rate of childhood poverty in half over the past 10 years through measures like increasing the minimum wage, targeting tax credits to low-income families and providing high-quality child care with minimal or no expense to parents.

"It's time we start doing the same sorts of things to try and reduce childhood poverty," McInerny said.

McInerny said the report contained one bright spot—the teenage pregnancy rate continues to decline in the United States.

The birth rate among teen girls aged 15 to 17 has declined from 32 per 1,000 in 1994 to 17 per 1,000 in 2010, the report said. Births among teens aged 18 and 19 also have declined.

"That's critically important, because we know children of parents who are teenagers have poorer socioeconomic status, and all the problems that come with that," McInerny said.

The report was compiled by the Federal Interagency Forum on Child and Family Statistics, which includes participants from 22 federal agencies, as well as partners in several private research organizations.

More information: To read the full report, visit the [Federal Interagency Forum on Child and Family Statistics](#).

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