

Food poverty becomes UK health emergency

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University of Liverpool experts have warned that food poverty in the UK could become a public health emergency.

In a letter published in the *British Medical Journal*, [population health](#) scientist, Dr David Taylor-Robinson and colleagues show that the number of malnutrition related admissions to hospital in England has doubled since 2008-09.

They also quote figures from the Institute for Fiscal Studies which indicate a decrease in calories purchased and substitution with unhealthier foods, especially in families with young children. This has taken place alongside an exponential rise in the number of people being issued with food bank vouchers by frontline care professionals.

"This has all the signs of a public [health emergency](#) that could go unrecognised until it is too late to take preventive action," warn the authors.

Lifelong effects

Malnutrition in children is particularly worrying, they add, because exposure during sensitive periods can have lifelong effects, increasing the risk of cardiovascular and other adult chronic diseases.

And they argue that because the Government has delayed the publication of research it commissioned into the rise in emergency food aid in the UK, "we can only speculate that the cause is related to the rising cost of

living and increasingly austere welfare reforms.

"Access to an adequate food supply is the most basic of human needs and rights. We should not allow food poverty in the UK to be the next [public health emergency](#)," researchers said

The letter is also signed by University of Liverpool [public health](#) specialists Professor Margaret Whitehead and Ben Barr, alongside experts from Blackburn with Darwen Borough Council and University College London.

More information: David Taylor-Robinson, Emeline Rougeaux, Dominic Harrison, Margaret Whitehead, Ben Barr, Anna Pearce. "Malnutrition and economic crisis: The rise of food poverty in the UK." *BMJ* 2013; 347 doi: [dx.doi.org/10.1136/bmj.f7157](https://doi.org/10.1136/bmj.f7157) (Published 3 December 2013)

Provided by University of Liverpool

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