

## Children's Sentinel Nutrition Assessment Program

*at Boston Medical Center*

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In these challenging economic times when many families are feeling anxious about their finances, low-income families face particularly difficult choices. Unlike other expenses such as housing and heat, food is the only elective part of the budget. Families often reduce the quantity and or quality of their food in order to make ends meet. This uncertain or limited access to enough nutritious food is called food insecurity.

Food insecurity disproportionately affects low-income families with children, especially those with young children. Eleven percent of the general population is food insecure while 17 percent of households with children under age six are food insecure. Numerous studies have shown that food insecurity is very harmful to children's health, development and school performance. Findings from the Children's Sentinel Nutrition Assessment Program (C-SNAP) have consistently shown that food insecurity is particularly harmful to young children ages three and under.

### **C-SNAP Findings on Food Security and Child Health:**

Compared to infants and toddlers in food secure households, those in food insecure households are:

- 30% more likely to have a history of hospitalization.
- 90% more likely to be reported in fair or poor health.
- Nearly twice as likely to have iron deficiency anemia.

In addition, the effects of food insecurity are cumulative:

- Compared to infants and toddlers in food insecure households, infants and toddlers in households with both household and child food insecurity had significantly higher odds of having a history of hospitalization and of being reported in fair or poor health.

Child food insecurity is the most serious level of food insecurity, when parents are no longer able to protect their children from food shortages in the household.

In the first three years of life, children grow and develop at a pace not matched in any other period of their life. This is the moment when they lay the foundations for much of their future health and cognitive development. Good nutrition can set them on a trajectory for health and success in school and later in the workforce.

### **C-SNAP Findings on Food Security and Child Development**

Children who are at risk for developmental delay have slow or unusual development in one or more areas, such as speaking, moving or behavior.

- Compared to infants and toddlers in food insecure households, those in food secure households are 24% less likely to be at risk for developmental delays.