

# Childhood Hunger : Cause and Effect

*Child hunger and food insecurity is due to family food insecurity.*

**Food Insecurity:** *Not having a consistent, sustainable source of food that meets nutritional needs.*

**Hunger:** *Inability to access food consistently and need to reduce food intake, eat poor diets and often go without any food. Research shows that parents skip meals in order to have enough food to feed their children.*

## Cause

### 1) Family Economic Insecurity

Low wages, job loss, disability, lack of benefits & health care, essential expenses leave no money for food.

Quick Facts:

- Poverty in MT: 14.9% (2008) to 15.1% (2009)
- Child poverty in MT: 20.6% (2008) to 21.4% (2009)
- The Northwest Job Gap Report: Family of 4 needs \$57,364/year (27.58/hr) to live
- >51% of jobs in MT pay less than 13.54/hr
- 1 in 3 households in MT are at risk of food insecurity
- Over 92,000 children in MT are at risk of food insecurity
- Children and families in urban and reservation areas at highest risk of food insecurity
- Utilities, rent, child care, medical bills, and transportation expenses leave no money for food
- Emergency food, on average, last 5-8 days

### 2) Poor Participation in Public Food Assistance Programs

Public programs provide a sustainable source of healthy food to poor families and children if they are income eligible. Lack of participation by families that are eligible increases food insecurity.

### 3) Inadequate Ability to Access Food

Due to:

- a) Distances to full service grocery stores (Food Deserts)
- b) Limited access to local food due to cost
- c) The rising cost of food in grocery stores

## Effect

*Normal growth and development should be a seamless process without frequent interruptions in vital needs like nutrition.*

*Hungry children incur developmental impairments that limit their physical, intellectual and emotional development.*

### Impact on Child Health

- Slow growth, poor stature, deficiency diseases, and early onset of chronic diseases like Type II Diabetes and obesity.
- Increased school absenteeism due to decreased immune function.

**= Impact on state Medicaid expenses.**

### Impact on Academic Performance

- Lowered learning ability & poor cognitive development
- Lower math and reading scores
- More likely repeat a grade
- Behavior problems = more disciplinary actions, need for school nurse, inability to have normal interactions w/ other students
- Lower success in school years = increased risk of school dropouts

### Impact on Workforce, Job Readiness, and Lifetime Earnings

- Poor academic outcomes in high school → reduce potential for higher education/learn a trade or skill → lack of well-paying jobs and self-sufficiency in adult life.
- Hunger in childhood = adults that are not as well prepared physically, mentally or socially to perform effectively. This can result in a workforce that is less competitive, has lower skill levels, and seriously constrained human capital.

**= Dependence on public assistance including Medicaid and the inability to become a tax paying citizens.**