

5 CRITICAL NEEDS FOR BABIES IN COVID-19: Meeting Basic Needs



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Boosting Babies' Health and Development by Meeting Their Basic Needs

The Investment:

- \$100 billion in funding for emergency rental assistance
- Federal eviction moratorium extension for at least 12 months
- 15% boost to the SNAP maximum benefit & increase minimum monthly SNAP benefit to \$30
- \$200 million in funding for procurement and local distribution of diapers for families in need

Why is this need critical?

- **Critical for family financial stability:** Prior to the pandemic, [more than two in five infants and toddlers](#) lived in low-income families that often lack the financial stability to consistently meet basic needs like nutritious food, diapers and wipes, stable housing, health care, and all of the resources needed to support a young child's healthy development. Now, as many of the supports in the CARES Act have lapsed more families are reporting anticipating significant material hardship in the coming month, with [over 40% of families](#) reporting difficulty paying for basic needs in August.
- **Critical for babies' health:** Resources such as dry diapers and the ability to put food on the table help ensure the health of babies. Access to diapers prevents severe diaper rash or urinary tract infections that could send them to the emergency room; an adequate supply of diapers can also reduce parental stress that could adversely affect the baby. SNAP provides greater access to good nutrition which boosts babies' health and brain development.
- **Critical for babies' rapid brain development:** Stable housing supports family well-being and lowers stress levels, setting the stage for nurturing parenting and experiences that will foster healthy child development. When babies have the security and predictability of safe places, they are better able to develop within the context of their caregiver relationships. Even before the pandemic, [one in six babies](#) lived in crowded housing.

Investment Details:

Congress should provide at least \$100 billion in funding for emergency rental assistance and extend a universal federal eviction moratorium for at least 12 months.

The psychological and physical effects of security are tremendous. Stable homes support family well-being and lower stress levels, setting the stage for nurturing parenting that reinforces healthy child development. Instability and hardship in the earliest years of life comes with the developmental price tag of negative long-term consequences for children's well-being. The lack of a stable home creates

greater risk of food insecurity and poor health outcomes, such as developmental delays, behavior problems, and difficulty maintaining a healthy weight. Children who experience homelessness are even more likely to suffer developmental delays and poor health. As with most traumatic experiences a child endures, longer periods of homelessness are associated with more negative outcomes.

Chris from Farmington, MO speaks to the need for robust housing supports:

“We are doing our best to cut back on a few things and save when we can, but if we don't have income somehow coming in then our bills, mortgage, utilities, etc. will suffer having to decide between that or food for the children.”

Before the pandemic, we know that families were struggling to keep a stable roof over their heads. Given the economic downturn brought on by COVID-19, families are experiencing higher levels of stress around meeting their basic needs, including making each month's rent or mortgage payment. Now, even with a temporary eviction moratorium in place, families will still face mounting back rent payments in at the end of the year, which will be especially harmful if they are unemployed or have a job with low wages.

Congress should increase SNAP benefits to improve child well-being and meet family nutrition needs.

Building on the evidence of the effectiveness of increasing SNAP benefits in improving young children's health and reducing food insecurity, Congress should boost the maximum SNAP benefit by 15 percent and increase the minimum monthly SNAP benefit to \$30 immediately.

Juliane from Utah shares her family's struggle to meet their basic needs:

“Our work hours are at a minimum and that means rationing. However when your kids are home from school that means all your expenses increase, and we're very tight on everything. Diapers have been hard to find and even some of the more affordable foods.”

SNAP is the first line of defense against hunger and food insecurity for the majority of low-income infants, toddlers, and their families. SNAP overall is effective in reducing food insecurity by helping families with low income afford healthy foods and providing information about nutrition. Even so, one in six of households with infants and toddlers still experiences low or very low food insecurity. The current SNAP benefit is too low to ensure enough food for the household.

For very young children, the amount of the SNAP benefit, or “dose”, matters. Increased SNAP benefits as part of the stimulus during the Great Recession both sets a precedent for raising benefits during a severe economic downturn and provides the evidence of its benefits for babies and toddlers whose healthy physical and neural development is fueled by good nutrition. [Research shows](#) that young children in families that received the increased SNAP benefit were significantly more likely to be classified as healthy and well than children in similar families not receiving SNAP. Prior to the benefit boost, little difference was observed. However, [when the benefit was reduced](#) several years later, household food insecurity increased by 23 percent, while child food insecurity increased by 17 percent—the latter a sign that adults take the brunt of reductions in food availability if they can.

Congress should provide \$200 million in funding to support procurement and local distribution of diapers to families in need.

Even prior to the pandemic, nearly one in three American families with young children reported experiencing diaper need. Some research suggests these needs may be particularly acute for grandparents raising a young child—[almost one in ten infants and toddlers live with a grandparent](#). Given the current economic fallout from the pandemic, even more families will be challenged to afford and secure diapers for their babies. With reports of diaper shortages in stores across the nation, the number of families struggling to obtain diapers is rising.

Jamie from Gillette, WY speaks to diaper need:

“My kid can potty train when his wipes and pull ups run out, but there are moms that have young kids who have no way to get diapers and wipes if or when they run out. There needs to be some effort to change the situation, otherwise babies will not get what they need.”

Diapers are one of the most basic needs for families with babies and toddlers. Without enough diapers to ensure they can stay clean and dry, infants and toddlers are at risk of serious health conditions such as skin infections, open sores, and urinary tract infections. If these conditions become severe, they would require medical attention that for low-income families without access regular practitioners, could mean a trip to the emergency room. With an already overburdened health care system, preventative measures must be taken to avoid unnecessary hospital and emergency room visits.

[Research](#) shows that mothers reporting mental health needs are more likely to report diaper need as well, suggesting that meeting the tangible need of being able to secure diapers for their young children could reduce parental stress. Such stress is likely to be heightened in the pandemic, as in previous disasters. Maternal mental distress can negatively impact the social-emotional health of young children.