



Food insecurity

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Key facts

Persistent food and nutrition insecurity continues to be a chronic problem. A main concern of food insecurity is insufficient nutrient intake and subsequent malnutrition. Globally, almost half of deaths among children under five years are linked to undernutrition (wasting, stunting, underweight). Children and adults who are malnourished have an increased risk of infection and severe disease and have higher rates of morbidity and mortality.

Drought, often exacerbated by environmental degradation and climate change, is the most common cause of food shortage and insecurity. This has a major impact on the health and well-being of both humans and animals (including livestock). Loss of livestock can increase both nutritional and economic instability of families and communities.

Other underlying factors often causing food insecurity include conflict, poverty, floods and lack of agricultural infrastructure.

Unlike rapid onset disasters, food insecurity often has a gradual onset. Response to food insecurity should include nutrition-specific interventions, guided by nutrition specialists, aimed at preventing or treating acute malnutrition and actions to address the root cause of the food insecurity (for example, actions to minimize the impact of existing drought; actions to improve agricultural infrastructure; etc.).

Main health impacts

Health concern	Risk factors	
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Mental health consequences	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mental health impacts including (but not limited to) severe anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and depression may occur as a result of experiencing food insecurity (for example, losing loved ones; experiencing illness; etc.). • Experiencing multiple traumatic events can lead to compound or complex trauma. 	
Malnutrition including micronutrient deficiency	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Food insecurity leads to insufficient nutrient intake and undernutrition. • Children under five years, pregnant and lactating women, people with chronic illness such as HIV and tuberculosis and the elderly are at higher risk. 	
Diarrhoeal diseases	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Limited access to clean water and lack of hygiene and sanitation services (due to drought, population displacement, etc.) can lead to diarrhoeal diseases. 	
Respiratory illnesses, skin diseases and vaccine-preventable diseases	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Undernutrition leaves vulnerable groups immunocompromised and more likely to be impacted by illness and disease, resulting in higher morbidity and mortality. • Population displacement due to drought and/or food insecurity can lead to overcrowded, communal emergency shelters, which coupled with difficulty maintaining proper sanitation and hygiene practices can lead to problems such as respiratory illnesses, skin diseases and some vaccine-preventable diseases. 	

Disease tools that may be relevant

[_> Acute diarrhoea](#)

[_> Cholera](#)

[_> Hepatitis A](#)

[_> Hepatitis E](#)

[_> Typhoid fever](#)

[_> Acute respiratory infections preventable by vaccine - Diphtheria, chickenpox, mumps, rubella, whooping cough](#)

- ._> Measles
- ._> Meningococcal meningitis
- ._> Poliomyelitis (polio)
- ._> Malaria
- ._> Acute respiratory infections (ARIs)
- ._> Acute malnutrition