



Consumer Federation of America

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NEW REPORT SHOWS THAT CHILDREN FROM LOW-INCOME FAMILIES FACE GREATER SAFETY RISKS

Better Income-Related Safety Data Would Improve Knowledge of These Risks

Washington, DC – This morning, the Consumer Federation of America (CFA) released a report demonstrating that children from low-income families are at greater risk for unintentional injuries and foodborne illnesses than children from higher-income families. Over two-fifths of children (44%) in the United States, according to the National Center for Children in Poverty, live in low-income families.

The report, [*Child Poverty, Unintentional Injuries and Foodborne Illness: Are Low-Income Children at Greater Risk?*](#), which drew from incomplete statistical information and dozens of academic studies, also concluded that, to more fully understand these risks, it is essential to begin collecting better data on the relationship of family income to product related unintentional injuries and deaths as well as to incidence of foodborne illness.

The CFA report was sponsored by UL (Underwriters Laboratories). In the future, as well as widely distributing the report, CFA and UL will organize forums that bring together groups of experts and other interested parties to discuss related problems and solutions. According to Gus Schaefer, UL Senior Vice President & Public Safety Officer, “UL is committed to this research as together we investigate the factors influencing unintentional injuries as it relates to low-income children and the solutions necessary to improve data collection, tracking and education outreach efforts.”

Low-Income Children at Greatest Risk of Unintentional Injuries

The report identified the following about unintentional injuries suffered by children:

- Unintentional injuries represent the leading cause of death and injury for children between the ages of one and fourteen. Each year, such injuries are responsible for about 5,000 child deaths, about 5 million child emergency room visits, and millions more unreported injuries.

- These injuries are suffered disproportionately by children from low-income families. In fact, several studies show that income is a better predictor of risk than either race or ethnicity.
- The death rates of several important types of unintentional injuries may be considerably higher for low-income children – at least double for deaths from motor-vehicle accidents, fires, and drownings – than for higher-income children, according to a study that reviewed child deaths reported in Maine.
- Non-fatal injury rates were also much higher for low-income children. One study found the highest rate among low-income children and the lowest rate among high-income children. Another study found that children receiving Medicaid had injury rates double those of the national average.
- Higher injury rates are related both to environmental factors – e.g., more hazardous streets, unsafe playgrounds, older and less safe houses and appliances – and to human factors – e.g., higher incidence of smoking, less income to afford safety precautions, less parental supervision in single-parent families, and less knowledge about product safety and prevention.

“Low-income children are at greater risk of unintentional injuries,” said Rachel Weintraub, CFA’s Legislative Director and product safety expert. “This issue needs more attention from researchers, safety groups, social welfare groups, government agencies, and businesses selling related products,” she added.

Low-Income Children Face Conditions Associated with Foodborne Illnesses

The report identified the following about foodborne illnesses affecting children in low-income families:

- Children under 15 years of age account for roughly half of all foodborne illness. Children under 5 years of age are particularly vulnerable, experiencing the highest rates of infection for *Campylobacter*, *Salmonella*, *Shigella*, *E. coli* O157:H7 and other shiga-toxin producing *E. coli* bacteria (STEC).
- Several studies have found that economic deprivation increases the likelihood of bacterial, parasitic, and viral infections. This research links higher rates of particular foodborne illnesses because of factors such as poorer nutrition, greater exposure to food safety risks in retail stores located in lower-income neighborhoods, and poorer access to health care. One mitigating factor for exposure to pathogens is that low-income populations tend to consume more processed foods and fewer high-risk foods such as undercooked eggs and meat.
- One study of inspection scores for retail food establishments in Detroit found that for each additional ten percent of individuals below the poverty line, there was an increase of 0.6 critical food safety violations.

“Given the high incidence of foodborne illness among children, it is especially important to learn more about the influence of factors on the safety of foods consumed by low-income children,” said Chris Waldrop, Director of CFA’s Food Policy Institute.

“Collecting more and better data related to family income would greatly improve our understanding of these safety issues,” he added.

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The Consumer Federation of America is a non-profit association of nearly 300 consumer organizations that was founded in 1968 to advance the consumer interest through research, advocacy, and education. For decades, it has given priority to product and food safety issues.

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