



HEALTH

Kids Go Hungry Despite Free Summer Meals

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For many children, summer brings hunger.

That's why in Alameda County, kids can eat lunch for free at more than 200 locations. Across the state, more than 3,400 schools, churches and community groups offer free lunch, all paid for by the federal government.

But Tia Shimada with California Food Policy Advocates says a recent report finds 50 percent fewer students are taking advantage of the meals compared to a decade ago.

"There has been a drastic decrease in summer school in California," Shimada said. "And historically in California, the majority of children who were served by the federally funded summer meal programs were served at school sites."

Allison Pratt with the Alameda County Community Food Bank says that means more kids are going hungry.

"We see more families with children calling our emergency food helpline," Pratt said. "We see more children standing in line at soup kitchens during the summer months, so we know there's a great need out there."

Alameda County actually saw an increase in participation between 2010 and 2011, in part because the meal program came to libraries, something Pratt hopes to see replicated statewide.

Shimada says it's up to state legislators and school sites to get hungry students to free meals.