



For Immediate Release

Contact:
Troy Moore
203.295.7987
troy@diaperbanknetwork.org

The NDBN Diaper Check 2023: Nearly Half of U.S. Families Struggle to Afford Diapers

Diaper Insecurity and Food Insecurity Plague Lower Income Families

JUNE 15, 2023, NEW HAVEN – Research released by the National Diaper Bank Network (NDBN) reports that nearly half (47%) of U.S. families with young children struggle to afford diapers. [*The NDBN Diaper Check 2023: Diaper Insecurity among U.S. Children and Families*](#), a nationally representative study commissioned by the National Diaper Bank Network, shows a significant increase (14 percentage points) in diaper need, since the [*first study conducted on diaper need in 2010*](#). Multiple research studies have shown that one in three families (about 33%) cannot afford enough diapers to keep their children clean, dry, and healthy. (See [*2013*](#) and [*2017*](#) studies.)

“Diaper need is a public health crisis. As the study shows, it is associated with physical, emotional, and economic harm to children and families,” said NDBN CEO Joanne Samuel Goldblum. “The sharp increase we see today may be a result of our evolving understanding of diaper need. Researchers are asking parents more in-depth questions about their ability to afford diapers and how diaper need impacts other areas of their lives. The rise in diaper need or diaper insecurity may be because, due to low wages, families are finding it harder to afford basic necessities. Or it is a combination of more thorough measurement and more need. One thing is certain: This is a call to action to support community-based diaper banks and advocate for public policies to end diaper need.”

Respondents were flagged as experiencing diaper insecurity if they responded “yes” to questions like: Do you run out of diapers because you cannot afford enough? The study also asked parents and caregivers if they cut back on other household and/or personal expenses to afford diapers, and 46% said that they did.

“People are making difficult choices to keep their children diapered,” according to the study’s lead research analyst, Kelley E.C. Massengale, Ph.D. “We also saw family

earnings impacted by diaper insecurity. A quarter (24.5%) of those families reporting diaper need missed work because they did not have the diapers required to send their babies to child care.” In families where diaper need caused adults to miss work, they lost, on average, 5.1 workdays in the past 30 days, which means a loss of \$296 per month for a parent earning the federal minimum wage of \$7.25 per hour.

The most common item that families eliminated from their budgets to afford diapers was entertainment, such as a trip to a restaurant or the movies. That can have serious ramifications, said Rushina Cholera, M.D., Ph.D., a pediatrician and epidemiologist who is an assistant professor of pediatrics at Duke University. Families “are not able to spend any extra money on things that can relieve stress, which may relieve the mental health concerns that are so prevalent right now. (This) may not seem like a necessity but, for the health of families, we’re always encouraging that families spend time together,” said Dr. Cholera.

“[Our own research](#) showed an association between diaper need and maternal depression,” said Dr. Megan V. Smith, member of the board of directors, NDBN. “In *The NDBN Diaper Check*, adults reported that they experience stress and doubt their own parenting skills when they cannot provide diapers for their children. Diaper need is a health-related social need like food and housing. Research continues to link diapers directly to important maternal, infant, and child health outcomes such as maternal depression and attendance at preventative pediatric care visits. NDBN’s research opens up the possibilities of policy action through Medicaid to address diaper need and thereby improve maternal and child health across the U.S.”

Of caregivers who reported diaper need, 82% reported feeling depression or hopelessness in the two weeks before they had taken the survey, compared with 42% of those who did not have diaper need.

NDBN plans to make *The NDBN Diaper Check* an annual survey and will continue to release data from the 2023 survey throughout the year. Later this year, NDBN will release a national study quantifying the economic impact of diaper distribution.

The NDBN Diaper Check showed a connection between diaper and food insecurity. When families experienced diaper insecurity, 35.4% reported cutting back on food and 27.8% of adults reported skipping meals themselves to conserve money.

“NDBN’s more than 300 member basic needs banks do amazing work to rise to the challenge of diaper need,” said Goldblum. “Our mission includes mobilizing a larger response. These data show a generation in true crisis. Without societal investments,

the prospects for them – for our whole country – will be bleak. We’ve seen encouraging moves by states to pay for diapers through Medicaid or Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF). The federal government is piloting funding for diapers in some communities. We need to scale up proactive measures like these to ensure that every child has the opportunity to thrive.”

The polling firm YouGov administered the survey to a nationally representative sample. There were more than 1,000 participants. The margin of error of the survey is +/-3.91%. The survey was conducted between April 21 and May 18, 2023.

An executive summary of *The NDBN Diaper Check 2023: Diaper Insecurity among U.S. Children and Families* includes more information on how diaper need is affecting American families. The full executive summary, which includes a selection of charts with key findings and data points from the study, as well as downloadable b-roll with experts commenting on the findings, is [available here](#).

#