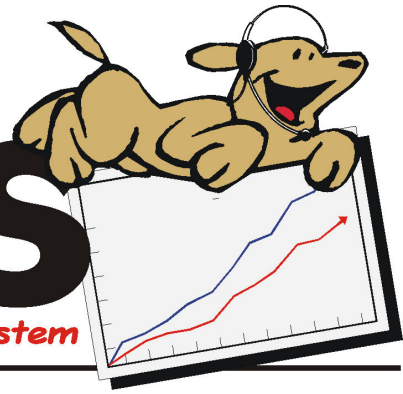




# RRFSS

*Rapid Risk Factor Surveillance System*

**HEALTH DEPARTMENT**



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## **Food Wellness For All! Durham Region: Food Access and Security**

One of the goals of public health is to work with community partners to promote access to sufficient, safe, nutritious and personally acceptable food for people of all ages. The Durham Region Health Department has joined with groups such as *Durham Child Nutrition Project*, *Durham Region Community Gardens Network*, *Durham Lives' Access to Healthy Foods group*, *Feed the Need in Durham Committee* and *Durham Region Community Food Advisors* to strive towards food security for all residents in Durham Region.

In Canada, food security is not generally associated with a lack of available food. It is about having enough money to access sufficient, safe, and personally acceptable sources of food.

A widely accepted definition of food insecurity states that food insecurity exists whenever the availability of nutritionally adequate and safe foods or the ability to acquire acceptable foods in socially acceptable ways is limited or uncertain. Food insecurity tends to follow a continuum from people worrying about having enough money to buy food for the household to people not eating the quality or variety of foods they want because of lack of money. Ultimately, the quantity of food available for the household may not be sufficient and hunger may occur.

The RRFSS is a random-digit-dialled telephone survey of adults aged 18 years and older, conducted by the Institute for Social Research at York University, on behalf of the Durham Region Health Department. Since 2001, a sample of 100 residents has been surveyed on a monthly basis regarding health risk behaviours such as smoking, alcohol use, well water testing, immunization, etc (for further information, see [www.region.durham.on.ca](http://www.region.durham.on.ca) under health department/ health statistics). The information is essential to the Health Department for planning and evaluating programs and services as well as monitoring emerging health issues.

From January to December 2001, the Rapid Risk Factor Surveillance System (RRFSS) surveyed 1,197 households regarding food security issues. In the past 12 months, 14% of Durham Region households reported food insecurity (95% CI 12-15%). This indicates that over one in ten households worried about the amount of food, did not eat the quality or variety of foods that they wanted, or did not have enough food to eat because of lack of money. A similar result (12%) was reported in the Canadian Community Health Survey 2000/2001 (95% CI 9-15%).

Household income has been shown to play an important role in food security. From January to December 2001, Durham Region households with income less than \$30,000 were over three times more likely to report food insecurity in the past year (RR = 3.5, 95% CI = 2.1-4.6). Income-related factors such as age, source of income, type of household, etc. need consideration to fully explore the association between income and food security and identify households at risk.

Annual monitoring of the basic cost of healthy eating using the Nutritious Food Basket tool shows that it has become more expensive to buy nourishing food in Durham Region. In June 2001, the average weekly cost of feeding a family of four was \$117.28. This increased almost 4% in 2002 to \$121.40.

According to the RRFSS 2001, 25% of food-insecure households did not have a place to go if they needed better quality of food, more variety of food, or did not have enough food to eat (95% CI = 18-32%). To begin to address the barriers that Durham Region residents face in accessing food, the Durham Region Health Department has developed the Food Resource Directory that lists the addresses and phone numbers of places where food is available throughout Durham Region (see [www.region.durham.on.ca](http://www.region.durham.on.ca) under health department/community nutrition).

Poorer health outcomes are more prevalent in food-insecure households. From the RRFSS 2001, respondents from food-insecure households were over two times more likely to report their health as fair to poor (RR = 2.4, 95%CI = 1.6-3.4).

### **In summary...**

- 14% of Durham Region households report food insecurity.
- Households with income less than \$30,000 were over three times more likely to report food insecurity.
- The cost of healthy eating, based on the Durham Region Nutritious Food Basket, has increased almost 4% from 2001 to 2002.
- Residents from food-insecure households were over two times more likely to report poorer health.

### **Resources**

Che, J. and Chen, J. Food insecurity in Canadian households. Health Reports 2001; 12(4): 11-22.

#### **Data Notes:**

- **95% Confidence Interval (CI)** refers to the range of values that has a 95% chance of including the 'true' value. A wide confidence interval reflects a large amount of variability or imprecision. Usually, the larger the sample size, the narrower the confidence intervals.
- **Relative Risk (RR)** refers to a ratio of the probabilities of an event occurring in exposed and unexposed groups. The relative risk will be greater than 1.0 when the risk of the event occurring is greater in the exposed group than in the unexposed group. The relative risk will be less than 1.0 when the risk in the exposed group is less than the risk in the unexposed group.
- **RRFSS** is a telephone survey that relies on self-report measures. The potential for recall and reporting bias exists. Households without telephones are excluded from the survey. In 2001, Durham Region's response rate was 60%.