

# One in four Baltimore residents live in a food desert, report says

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A new report by researchers at the Johns Hopkins Center for a Livable Future (CLF), in collaboration with the Baltimore Food Policy Initiative, found that one in four of the city's residents live in so-called food deserts with limited access to healthy foods.

The report, released today, is available online on the Center for a Livable Future's Maryland Food System Map website. The findings were highlighted at a press conference featuring Baltimore City Mayor Stephanie Rawlings-Blake, other [city](#) officials and CLF representatives.

Neighborhoods with food deserts have higher rates of diseases linked to unhealthy diets, including cardiovascular disease and diabetes. Overall mortality rates are also higher in these areas. While not the only factor impacting these outcomes, food deserts can be a significant contributor, the researchers say.

The report found that 34 percent of African Americans live in food deserts, compared to only eight percent of white residents. Children are also disproportionately affected, with 30 percent of Baltimore City's school-aged children living in food deserts.

'These statistics highlight the inequities in [healthy food](#) access in Baltimore City,' says Robert Lawrence, M.D., director of the CLF, which is based at the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health. 'The maps included in the report show where the need for healthy food is concentrated, highlighting where residents may be at a higher risk for

diet-related health problems. Now that we know more clearly where there are needs, we can work with the city to ensure all residents have access to healthy food.'

The report defines a food desert in Baltimore City as an area where residents must travel more than one-quarter of a mile to reach a supermarket, the median household income is at or below 185 percent of the federal poverty level, over 30 percent of households lack access to a vehicle, and the supply of healthy food is low.

The methods used are unique to Baltimore City and are an accurate reflection of what residents experience in their communities. The analysis is the first to include access to a vehicle and the supply of healthy food in all City food stores in the criteria, in addition to the distance to supermarkets and household income, which are commonly included in food desert assessments.

'As a community advocate, I'm very happy to see the challenges in the food environment taken seriously and addressed with a multi-tiered approach,' says Joyce Smith, a Baltimore City resident and community liaison for the CLF. 'Bringing the community to the table alongside partners at the city and Johns Hopkins is crucial for solving this issue.'

The map and report will be used by researchers at the CLF and Baltimore City officials as a roadmap to guide ongoing policy and programs to improve economic development, city planning and health department strategies along with continued CLF research on healthy [food](#) access in Baltimore City.

Provided by Johns Hopkins University Bloomberg School of Public Health

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