

# Children with Special Needs in California

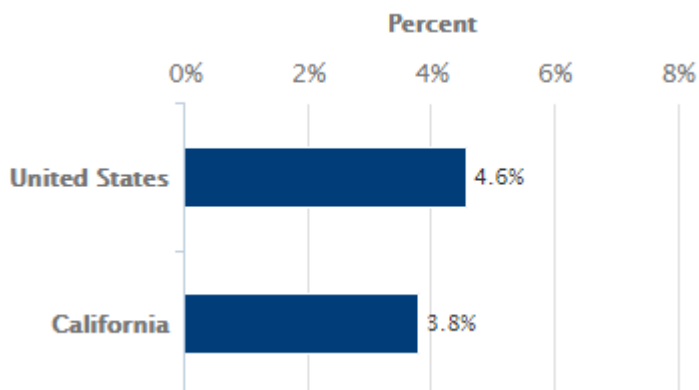
## Children Ages 0-17 with Special Health Care Needs: 2022

Locations	Percent
United States	20.8%
California	15.8%
Alameda and Santa Clara Counties	14.1%[!]
Alpine, Amador, Butte, Calaveras, Colusa, Del Norte, El Dorado, Glenn, Humboldt, Inyo, Lake, Lassen, Mariposa, Mendocino, Modoc, Mono, Nevada, Placer, Plumas, Shasta, Sierra, Siskiyou, Sutter, Tehama, Trinity, Tuolumne, Yolo, and Yuba Counties	18.1%
Contra Costa, San Mateo, and Solano Counties	20.3%[!]
Fresno County	12.7%[!]
Imperial and Riverside Counties	15.4%[!]
Kern, Kings, Madera, Merced, Stanislaus, and Tulare Counties	13.4%
Los Angeles County	16.7%
Marin, Napa, and Sonoma Counties	12.5%
Monterey, San Benito, and Santa Cruz Counties	17.0%[!]
Orange County	17.1%[!]
Sacramento County	12.6%[!]
San Bernardino County	18.0%[!]
San Diego County	19.1%[!]
San Francisco County	10.3%
San Joaquin County	15.4%[!]
San Luis Obispo and Santa Barbara Counties	17.0%[!]
Ventura County	10.0%[!]

**Definition:** Estimated percentage of children ages 0-17 with special health care needs (e.g., in 2022, 15.8% of California children had special health care needs).

**Data Source:** U.S. Dept. of Health and Human Services, National Survey of Children's Health (Jan. 2024).

## Children with Major Disabilities: 2021



## What It Is

On kidsdata.org, indicators related to children with special health care needs (CSHCN) include data on demographics and other characteristics, the impacts of special health care needs on children and their families, health insurance coverage, and access to and quality of health care and other services. See kidsdata.org's [CSHCN category](#) for a full list of indicators.

## Why This Topic Is Important

Nearly 1.4 million California children, and more than 15 million children nationwide, have or are at increased risk for a chronic health condition and require care and related services of a type or amount beyond that required by children generally. As advances in technology and medicine continue to improve and extend the lives of children with special health care needs (CSHCN), these numbers are expected to grow. Over the next decade, for instance, it is estimated that the number of children with medically complex conditions will double.

When compared with children who do not have ongoing physical, developmental, behavioral, or mental health problems, CSHCN are more likely to be limited in their ability to function and participate in daily activities. They also are more likely to experience social problems, academic challenges, and other types of adversity that can complicate their medical care. As a result, CSHCN often rely on a range of services from multiple sectors, and their parents and family members often face higher caregiving burdens and experience more stress and difficulties with employment and finances when compared with other families.

Obtaining timely, appropriate, and affordable care is a major problem for many CSHCN families. Beyond service system barriers, social factors and practices—such as poverty and discrimination (e.g., on the basis of race/ethnicity or ability)—influence access to care, and, as a result, health outcomes. For example, CSHCN of color and those in low-income families are more likely to have unmet health needs and limited access to high-quality care when compared with their more affluent and white peers. They also are less likely to access other important resources such as quality education and stable housing.

## How Children Are Faring

In 2022, an estimated 21% of U.S. children and 16% of California children ages 0-17 had special health care needs—meaning they had or were at increased risk for a chronic physical, developmental, behavioral, or emotional

**Data Source:** Population Reference Bureau, analysis of U.S. Census Bureau [American Community Survey](#) summary files and public use microdata (Jan. 2024).

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children in 2021-2022, 48.1% had received a developmental screening).

**Data Source:** UCLA Center for Health Policy Research, [California Health Interview Survey](#) (Jan. 2024).

receiving developmental screenings ranged from less than 30% to more than 70%.

*View references for this text and additional research on this topic:*

<https://new.kidsdata.org/topic/14/characteristics-of-children-with-special-needs/summary>



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