

# Iron deficiency prevalence increased in women of reproductive age with differences noted by race and Hispanic origin group

## Background

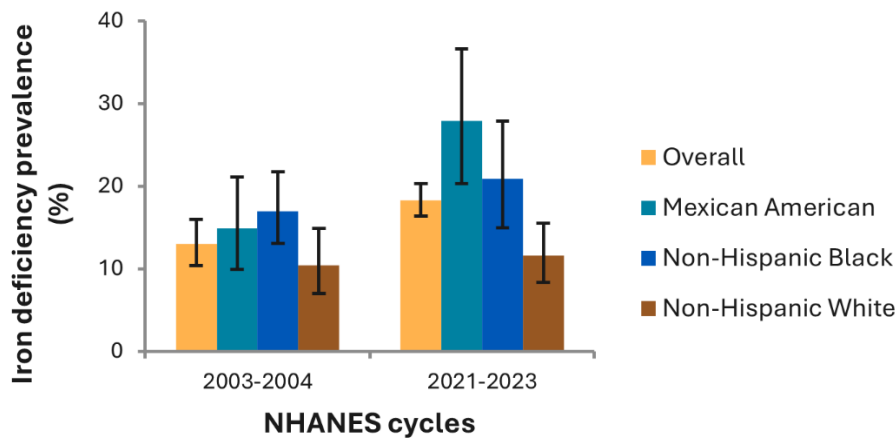
Iron is needed to make hemoglobin, the protein in red blood cells that carries oxygen to tissues. Children and women of reproductive age (females 12-49 years) are at risk for iron deficiency, which can progress to anemia if not treated.

Iron deficiency is most often diagnosed by measuring a protein called ferritin in blood serum. Low serum ferritin levels represent an early stage of iron deficiency. It is important to know that inflammation can raise ferritin levels, which may hide iron deficiency and thus make it harder to detect.

## Intake recommendations

Dietary Guidelines for Americans highlight iron, folate, and iodine as important nutrients during pregnancy.

## Prevalence of iron deficiency in U.S. women of reproductive age



Source: National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey (NHANES) 2003-2004 and August 2021-August 2023.

After adjusting for inflammation, the overall prevalence of low serum ferritin values increased significantly in women of reproductive age, rising from about 13% in 2003-2004 to about 18% in August 2021-August 2023. A similar significant increase was seen among Mexican-American women (from 15% to 28%). No change was found among non-Hispanic Black and non-Hispanic White women.

### **The 2026 Nutrition Report provides:**

- Nutritional biomarker information for dietary supplement users and non-users
- Reference information for physicians and scientists to detect high or low nutrient levels in people
- A look at nutrient levels over time to see trends in nutrition status
- Numbers that can be used to compare the effectiveness of nutrition interventions