

Pandemic EBT – Extra Food Benefits for Children

(Information as of April 10, 2020)



As part of the Families First Coronavirus Response Act that Congress passed on March 18th, many children are eligible for “Pandemic EBT” Food benefits while schools are closed, also called **P-EBT**. These are “electronic benefits transfer” benefits – emergency money to buy food at local grocery stores.

Likely by the end of April or in May, many Massachusetts low-income families will receive *Pandemic EBT food benefits* (P-EBT) for their school-aged children.

- Families **receiving SNAP benefits** (food stamps) will have P-EBT benefits issued directly onto their SNAP EBT card.
- Low-income families **approved for free or reduced-price meal status** will get special P-EBT Food Cards in the mail for each eligible child.

This P-EBT card is used like a debit card to buy food at grocery stores. This P-EBT food benefit is available for eligible school age children, **in addition** to any food pantry or free school meal pick-up that children receive.

How do families get the P-EBT Food benefit?

- Families already **getting SNAP** do not need to do anything. The Department of Transitional Assistance (DTA) will let them know when P-EBT will be issued on their EBT card, or they can check their EBT account.
- Families already **approved for Free or Reduced-Price meals** for their children do not have to do anything. Schools will send the state Department of Early and Secondary Education (DESE) a list of children eligible for P-EBT Food Card benefits. We expect that families will receive information from the state about the P-EBT Food Card and how to use it.
- Families who recently lost a job or work hours have the **right to apply for SNAP benefits any time**. If approved for SNAP, the family will get SNAP benefits for all household members **and** P-EBT benefits for their school-age children. The best and fastest way to apply for SNAP is by applying online or with a smartphone through [DTAConnect.com](https://www.dtaconnect.com).
- Families also have the **right to apply for Free or Reduced-Price school meal status any time**. This is important for families not eligible for SNAP or who do not want to apply for SNAP. Children approved for free or reduce-price meals qualify for the P-EBT Food benefits. Many schools have meal applications online or forms that can be printed and returned to the school by email, mail or fax. Families should check out their school’s website or call the Food Services Department for information.

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When will families receive the P-EBT food benefits?

Each state must submit a State Plan to the federal government (USDA).

Massachusetts already submitted their plan the week of April 6th (one of the early states to do so). USDA **must approve** all State plans. Once approved, DTA, DESE and school districts will work together to identify the eligible children for P-EBT benefits.

We do not know the date that P-EBT benefits will be issued, hopefully late April or early May. This depends on when USDA approves the state plan and conditions. Once the P-EBT benefits are issued, families can use their P-EBT benefits for food any time in the coming months. They do *not* need to be spent right away.

More Information:

Note: Using P-EBT benefits does not impact a parent or child's immigration status. Public charge does not apply to P-EBT benefits. See information from immigration experts here:

[Protectingimmigrantfamilies.org/immigrant-eligibility-for-public-programs-during-covid-19/](https://protectingimmigrantfamilies.org/immigrant-eligibility-for-public-programs-during-covid-19/)

The Food Research and Action Center has produced information that states and school districts need to do to prepare for P-EBT benefits: [FRAC.org/research/resource-library/pandemic-ebt](https://frac.org/research/resource-library/pandemic-ebt)

For more information about DTA benefits during COVID-19, visit [MassLegalServices.org/DTA-COVID-19](https://masslegalservices.org/DTA-COVID-19) or [Mass.gov/DTA/COVID-19](https://mass.gov/DTA/COVID-19)

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Information on this FAQ as of April 10, 2020