

**D**uring the coronavirus pandemic, the federal nutrition programs are a vital source of support for individuals and families. This fact sheet covers the federal nutrition program options available for people during COVID-19, and includes information on program descriptions, benefits, special access options, and how you can connect people to program benefits.

## PROGRAMS

- **SNAP Benefits for Individuals and Families**
- **Child Nutrition Programs Available During School Closures**
- **Pandemic Electronic Benefit Transfer (P-EBT)**
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## SNAP Benefits for Individuals and Families

The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), formerly named the Food Stamp Program, is administered by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) and states to provide the first line of defense against hunger for people of all ages. SNAP provides monthly benefits to eligible low-income people to purchase food at grocery stores, farmers' markets, and other regular commercial food outlets through Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT) debit cards.

State and local agencies process SNAP applications. Depending on the SNAP Categorical Eligibility option

the state has chosen (<https://fns-prod.azureedge.net/sites/default/files/resource-files/BBCE2019%28December%29.pdf>), those households with gross incomes between 130 percent and 200 percent of the federal poverty level may qualify.

SNAP applications often can be submitted online, over the phone, by mail, or in person. Community centers, food banks, and other nonprofit partners may assist individuals with their SNAP applications. In addition to using SNAP benefits to purchase food at approved grocery stores, a growing number of SNAP participants can purchase food online for home delivery. Find out what resources are available for SNAP applicants and participants by state: <https://www.fns.usda.gov/snap/state-directory>.

## Child Nutrition Programs Available During School Closures

In response to the COVID-19 public health emergency, many schools have closed, but families may still be able to receive meals for their children. Many schools and community organizations are providing meals to take home or are delivering them to children's homes. Some even give out multiple days' worth of meals at a time. Most sites do not require the child to be present in order for parents or caregivers to pick up the meals. To help families locate meal sites near them, use USDA's site finder: <https://www.fns.usda.gov/meals4kids>.

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## Pandemic Electronic Benefit Transfer (P-EBT)

**P-EBT** is a new program that gives families with school children an EBT card to purchase food. This includes any child who attends a school that offers free school meals to all students. Families who have lost a job or wages also may now be eligible if they meet the income guidelines for SNAP or free or reduced-price school meals. P-EBT provides about \$5.70 per child for each day that school is closed due to the pandemic. This adds up to \$114 per child for four weeks.

Families who participate in SNAP will have the benefits added to their SNAP EBT card in the coming weeks. Families who do not participate in SNAP may automatically receive a P-EBT card in the mail, or may have to fill out a short application. This will depend on how their state has decided to operate the P-EBT program.

Families who did not receive free or reduced-price school meals before the COVID-19 health crisis began, but have since experienced a job loss or a cut in wages, may now be eligible and should consider applying for SNAP or contacting their child's school about applying for school meals.

Each state has to be approved by USDA to operate a P-EBT program. Once approved, the state can begin to provide benefits. For additional information, contact the state agency administering the school meals programs, typically the Department of Education: <https://www.fns.usda.gov/contacts>.

## Meals for Preschool Children and Children in Homeless Shelters

Children in child care and homeless shelters can receive nutritious meals and snacks paid for by the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP). Children of essential workers continue to be in child care as their parents work to provide health care, stock grocery store shelves, produce food, and engage in a myriad of other important jobs. Not only is CACFP an important support for providing healthy meals to those children still in child care, the program is also critical for providing meals to children enrolled but unable to attend.

Special rules have been implemented during COVID-19 that allow CACFP child care providers to offer take-out or delivered meals for children enrolled but currently unable to attend care due to social distancing requirements. If a center chooses to offer these meals, then parents or guardians can pick up non-congregate meals for their children. Children in homeless shelters can receive meals and snacks through CACFP. To learn more, contact your child care provider, State CACFP point-of-contact, or refer to your State agency website: <https://www.fns.usda.gov/contacts>.

## Food for Women, Infants, and Children

The Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) provides low-income nutritionally at-risk pregnant women, new mothers, infants, and children up to five years old with nutritious foods, nutrition education, and referrals to health care. Women, infants, and children are eligible for the program if they meet the income guidelines (i.e., at or below 185 percent of the federal poverty line), or are deemed automatically income-eligible based on participation in other programs, such as SNAP or Medicaid. Applicants must also be at nutritional risk (e.g., poor dietary intake, overweight, or anemic), which is broadly defined.

WIC food packages are prescribed to WIC participants based on their specific nutritional needs, and include a variety of foods intended to supplement their diets. WIC-authorized foods include fruits and vegetables, milk, soy milk, yogurt, cheese, tofu, eggs, juice, iron-fortified cereal, tuna, peanut butter, beans, whole-grain bread, tortillas, and rice, as well as infant formula, baby food, and infant cereal. WIC participants receive a WIC EBT card (a few states provide paper WIC food vouchers instead) to shop for WIC foods at authorized grocery stores.

During COVID-19, WIC is enrolling new participants and providing benefits to existing participants remotely. Most local WIC clinics have been closed due to the COVID-19 pandemic. To accommodate the need for social distancing, WIC services are now available over the phone or online. In most states, WIC can download benefits onto a WIC EBT card

remotely. Those few states with paper vouchers are mailing them to clients. Some agencies are offering the option to pick up paper vouchers or download benefits via drive-through services. Those potentially eligible for WIC or already on the program can learn more by calling the state WIC toll-free number, visiting the state website, calling the local WIC clinic or visiting their website, or using a web-based zip code search engine.

- Toll-free state WIC hotline numbers: <https://www.fns.usda.gov/wic/toll-free-numbers-wic-state-agencies>
- State WIC agency websites and additional information: <https://www.fns.usda.gov/contacts>
- Local WIC agency locator: <https://www.signupwic.com/>

## Meals and Food for Older Adults

### **Home-Delivered Meals (also called Meals on Wheels)** —

This program is typically for older adults who are homebound and cannot cook or prepare meals. Depending on where a person lives, they may be able to get meals delivered to their home. The meals might be hot, frozen, or shelf-stable. Because of the coronavirus, organizations are working to serve additional people, such as those who are quarantining. Organizations are also working to deliver the meals without contact between the delivery person and older adult to protect everyone's health. Who can get meals and how and when the meals are delivered varies by area. The Eldercare

Locator ([eldercare.acl.gov](http://eldercare.acl.gov) or call: 1-800-677-1116) and Meals on Wheels ([www.mealsonwheelsamerica.org/find-meals](http://www.mealsonwheelsamerica.org/find-meals)) have information on what areas have home-delivered meals programs.

**Congregate meals (also called meals with friends or community dining)** — Many meal sites have temporarily closed to protect the public's health during the coronavirus. Organizations are working to deliver meals to older adults who usually eat lunch at community dining sites, like senior centers, but can no longer do so because of coronavirus closures. The Eldercare Locator ([eldercare.acl.gov](http://eldercare.acl.gov) or call: 1-800-677-1116) and Meals on Wheels ([www.mealsonwheelsamerica.org/find-meals](http://www.mealsonwheelsamerica.org/find-meals)) have information on whether meals are available in your area.

**Commodity Supplemental Food Program** — Some states have programs that provide older adults with a box or bag of staple foods (canned fruits and vegetables, cheese, shelf-stable milk, cereals, potatoes, grains, peanut butter, and dried beans) each month through the Commodity Supplemental Food Program. Participants must be low-income and 60 years of age and older.

Older adults should check to see if the program is offered in their area and if the program can accept new participants. Current participants may want to check to see if there are changes to how and when the food box is being handed out during the coronavirus pandemic. USDA has information on participating states and contact information (<https://www.fns.usda.gov/contacts>).

## Resources

See FRAC's COVID-19 webpage with the most current updates on the federal nutrition programs during the pandemic: <https://frac.org/covid-19-updates>.