



Pandemic EBT

The Families First Coronavirus Response Act creates the Pandemic Electronic Benefit Transfer (P-EBT) program, an important opportunity to provide nutritional resources to families who are losing access to free or reduced-price school meals as school across the country close in response to COVID-19. P-EBT provides households an EBT card with the value of the free school breakfast and lunch reimbursement rates for the days that schools are closed. Schools must close for at least five consecutive days in order for families to receive a P-EBT card. Eligible households include those whose children are certified to receive free or reduced-price school meals and children who attend schools that offer free school meals to all students (such as community eligibility or Provision 2 schools).

State Plans

On March 20, 2020, the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Food and Nutrition Service provided guidance to states on implementing P-EBT. For a state to provide P-EBT benefits to households, the state's SNAP and Child Nutrition Agency must submit a joint plan to USDA that describes how they will operate P-EBT. The plan must address how the state will provide P-EBT benefits to families who participate in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and to those who do not participate in SNAP. It also will be important for the states to determine how they will serve families whose children attend schools that offer free school meals to all students (such as community eligibility or Provision 2 schools).

The Act gives USDA the authority to allow state child nutrition agencies and school nutrition departments to release information to SNAP administrators in order to implement P-EBT. Sharing information between child nutrition and SNAP agencies will be critical to providing all eligible households P-EBT cards.

States also should create a comprehensive communications strategy to inform eligible families and the general public about the purpose of P-EBT and how the benefits can be used.

Things to Consider

Across the country, SNAP offices are struggling to respond to the growing number of families and individuals who are becoming eligible for SNAP benefits. At the same time, social distancing is being encouraged in most if not every community across the country, and many states and communities are beginning to shelter in place. Developing a process that relies on technology, and limits the need for interaction by families with SNAP offices will be critical to ensuring that eligible families receive a P-EBT card, and that SNAP offices are not overwhelmed. In that regard, USDA may need to provide states with additional program flexibilities to achieve that goal.

Partnering with community stakeholders can help state agencies prepare and submit comprehensive plans to ensure that all eligible children receive P-EBT benefits during COVID-19 school closures, and can address the issues raised above.

Resources

- [USDA's State Guidance on P-EBT](#)
- [FRAC's fact sheet on the National School Lunch Program](#)
- [FRAC's Community Eligibility Resources webpage](#)
- [FRAC's fact sheet on Summer EBT](#)

FRAC will update this document as additional information about P-EBT develops. For more information on efforts and opportunities to ensure children have access to nutritious meals during COVID-19 school closures, visit [FRAC's website \(https://frac.org/COVID-19-updates\)](https://frac.org/COVID-19-updates).