DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES

News stories

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More help coming for hungry children

P-EBT benefits for 2020-2021 school year available starting in late March

February 10, 2021

More help is on the way for hundreds of thousands of hungry Minnesota children for the 2020-2021 school year. To ensure children receive the food benefits known as P-EBT, families should make sure they are approved for free or reduced-price meals at their school through the National School Lunch Program (https://www.fns.usda.gov/nslp/nslp-fact-sheet) as soon as possible.

P-EBT, which is short for Pandemic Electronic Benefit Transfer, provides food benefits for children who are not receiving the free or reduced-price school meals that they normally would because their school is using a distance- or hybrid-learning format.

“We understand the unplanned financial strain placed on family budgets when children are eating all of their meals at home,” said Human Services Commissioner Jodi Harpstead. “These new benefits will ease the burden on families so they can purchase nutritious food for their children.”

Who should apply?

Children will be eligible for P-EBT benefits for the 2020-2021 school year if they are approved to receive free or reduced-price meals at their school through the National School Lunch Program, and their school was in a distance- or hybrid-learning model for the majority of one or more months. There is no separate P-EBT application.

For children in grades kindergarten through 12 to receive free or reduced-price meals, their families must:

- Receive Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program benefits, or
- Receive Minnesota Family Investment Program benefits or Tribal Temporary Assistance for Needy Families, or
- Attend a community eligibility provision school (https://www.fns.usda.gov/cn/community-eligibility-provision), or
- Submit an Application for Educational Benefits and be approved through their school. Completing the application for free or reduced-price school meals does not guarantee eligibility for the current school year's P-EBT benefits. During the COVID-19 pandemic, many schools in Minnesota may be providing no-cost school meals through their own programs. These students may be eligible for P-EBT benefits but must submit an application to their school.

Families who are receiving SNAP, MFIP or Tribal TANF benefits, or whose children are already approved by their school to receive free or reduced-price meals, do not need to take any action to ensure eligibility.

"Our schools are the centers of our communities, providing not just an education but support for the whole child, which includes serving nutritious meals that would otherwise not be available to some students," said Education Commissioner Mary Cathryn Ricker. "At the Minnesota Department of Education, we are working in partnership with the Minnesota Department of Human Services to make sure as many eligible families as possible receive the benefits they need to provide children with the healthy meals they may be missing with students learning away from their classrooms."

An estimated 385,000 Minnesota children may be eligible to receive P-EBT benefits. The amount of benefits will vary based on the number of each school's distance- and hybrid-learning school days each month. Benefit amounts also may vary for different children in the household if they attend different schools or grade levels. Families must use the P-EBT benefit to purchase food within a year of the date issued.

When will families receive benefits?

The Minnesota Department of Human Services will begin mailing new P-EBT cards, issued in each child's name, in late March to eligible families who are approved by Feb. 28, and in subsequent months for families who apply after that. All benefits will be retroactive to September 2020.

"We urge families to apply right away," said Commissioner Harpstead. "We know how vital these benefits are and want to put them in the hands of families as soon as possible."

Where can families get more help?

Families who are interested in receiving P-EBT benefits and who are not currently receiving SNAP, MFIP or Tribal TANF benefits are encouraged to contact their children's schools for more information. Additional information can be found on the P-EBT webpage at mn.gov/dhs/p-ebt (https://mn.gov/dhs/p-ebt/).

Families in need of additional assistance accessing healthy foods are urged to contact their county or tribal human services offices, or Hunger Solutions Minnesota at www.hungersolutions.org (http://www.hungersolutions.org/).

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