Michigan Will Add Online Purchasing, Free "Quarantine Care Kits"; Additional supports provided for people who need to stay home

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LANSING, Mich. – To make life easier on families who need to stay home during the pandemic, Michigan families who participate in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) soon will be able to buy their food online from two national retailers. In addition, the state is also rolling out “quarantine care kits” with essential goods for families with low and moderate incomes who are in quarantine or isolation.

The Michigan Department of Health and Human Services (MDHHS) announced today that the state expects to have the online purchase option available before the end of this week. Michigan received approval from the U.S. Department of Agriculture Food and Nutrition Service to allow SNAP recipients to redeem their food assistance benefits at Amazon.com and Walmart.com.

“Before and since the COVID-19 pandemic, we’ve worked hard to make it easier for Michiganders to use food aid,” said MDHHS Director Robert Gordon. “Now that families can order groceries online using their EBT cards, it’ll be easier for them to put food on the table. This is especially important for the people who most need to stay home – those who are COVID positive, who are recent close contacts of persons who are positive, or who are vulnerable to COVID due to age or underlying medical conditions.”

Once online purchasing is activated today at 3 p.m. for Amazon and beginning Friday for Walmart, people who receive food assistance will be able to go to the Amazon and Walmart websites and use their Electronic Benefits Transaction cards – known in Michigan as Bridge Cards – for purchases of eligible food items just as one would use a credit or debit card for an online purchase.

Any delivery fee cannot be paid for using SNAP benefits. Curbside pickup is available at Walmart to avoid a delivery fee. Amazon currently is offering free delivery for orders over $35. Anyone who has cash assistance benefits loaded onto their Bridge Card will not be able to use the cash benefits for online purchases. Women, Infants and Children (WIC) benefits also cannot be used for online purchases.

MDHHS expedited efforts for approval of online purchases when the state was impacted by COVID-19.

In April, more than 1.4 million Michigan residents received food assistance benefits. In recent weeks, the state also has increased the monthly amount of food assistance for many households, provided new or additional benefits for the families of 900,000 children who qualify for free or reduced-price lunches at school, as well as made food assistance available to students in college Career and Technical Education programs.

MDHHS has also begun working with community partners on two projects that deliver food boxes to older adults or people who are otherwise vulnerable due to COVID-19.

The department's Bureau of Community Action and Economic Opportunity coordinates with local Community Action Agencies around the state to deliver Quarantine Care Kits to eligible households with incomes below 200 percent of the federal poverty level. One kit includes food. Another kit includes hygiene and cleaning products, home goods and masks. The priority is to serve people who are in quarantine or isolation as a result of COVID-19 or are vulnerable to the coronavirus due to their age or underlying medical conditions. Anyone who would like more information can call 211.

The MDHHS Aging & Adult Services Agency is also working with Area Agencies on Aging and federal and local partners on a number of food programs during the pandemic. One new program is the U.S. Department of Agriculture Farmers to Families Food Box. Through this program, Van Eerden Foodservice of Grand Rapids and LaGrasso Bros. Produce of Detroit will provide homebound older Michiganders with fresh fruit and vegetable boxes on weekly basis through the area agencies on aging. Anyone who would like information on any area agencies on aging food program can call the Elder Locator at 800-677-1116.

"Quarantine and isolation are not easy for anybody, and they're especially hard for people with fewer resources," Gordon said. "We're doing everything we can to help families do right for their families and for all Michiganders."

Information around the COVID-19 outbreak is changing rapidly. The latest information is available at Michigan.gov/Coronavirus and CDC.gov/Coronavirus.

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