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DHS News Release - Human Services launches new benefits for school children

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DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES

NEWS RELEASE

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Contact:
For media inquiries only
Katie Bauer
Communications
651-431-3833
Katie.Bauer@state.mn.us

Human Services launches new benefits for school children

Those on free and reduced-price meal program to receive additional SNAP benefits

To ensure 350,000 Minnesota school children who qualify for the federal free and reduced-price meal program have access to healthy food, the Minnesota Department of Human Services, in partnership with the Minnesota Department of Education and Code for America, recently launched the Pandemic Electronic Benefit Transfer, also referred to as P-EBT, benefit.

The Federal Family First Coronavirus Response Act allows children eligible for the meal program to receive Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits retroactive to March through the first week in June. This is in addition to any SNAP, Minnesota Family Investment Program (MFIP) or Unemployment Insurance benefits their families may already receive.

“Hundreds of thousands of school children depend on one or more healthy meals a day through the school meal program,” said Human Services Commissioner Jodi Harpstead. “This new program will ensure families can purchase healthy food to fill their children’s stomachs while easing the financial burden of extra grocery purchases.”

“It is so much harder for students to learn and grow when they are hungry,” said Education Commissioner Mary Cathryn Ricker. “Our schools have made incredible efforts to meet the nutritional needs of Minnesota’s students throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, but we know a gap remains and that makes it our responsibility to look for solutions to food insecurity. This program is an important step in filling that gap to make sure no child goes hungry.”

The Minnesota Department of Human Services will issue benefits in a lump sum of $325 per child; families must use the benefits to purchase food only within a year of the date issued. Families with children, 5-18 years old as of Sept. 1, 2019, who were receiving free or reduced meal, SNAP or MFIP benefits as of March 18, 2020, are eligible. Families will receive these benefits automatically and do not need to take any action. The department will load their benefits to their existing EBT cards on May 30, 2020. Families can check their EBT card balance at EBTedge.com.

Families who were receiving free or reduced meals for the 2019-2020 school year but who were not also receiving SNAP or MFIP benefits will need to sign up for a benefits card, known as a P-EBT card, to receive these additional funds. Working with partners at Code for America and the Minnesota Department of Education, the Minnesota Department of Human Services will launch a card application form on June 8, 2020. Applications can be submitted until June 30, 2020. The application can be accessed at: www.mn.p-ebt.org as of June 8, 2020. The department will issue benefits approximately every 10 business days after it receives applications.

Pending the number of applications, the department could issue as much as $113,750,000 in P-EBT benefits.

Individuals in need of assistance accessing or using these benefits can contact the P-EBT hotline after June 1, 2020, at 651-431-4050 or 800-657-3698, Monday through Friday from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. Families in need of additional assistance accessing healthy foods are urged to contact their county or tribal human services office or the Minnesota Food Helpline at 888-711-1151 or www.hungersolutions.org.

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