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Kentucky Students Eligible for New Emergency Food Benefits

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FRANKFORT, Ky. (May 21, 2020) – The Kentucky Cabinet for Health and Family Services (CHFS) Department for Community Based Services (DCBS) and the Kentucky Department of Education are partnering to provide food assistance to families who have lost access to free or reduced-price school meals during the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) emergency.

Beginning May 23, Kentucky families with students who normally receive free or reduced-price meals at school may get financial assistance to replace those meals through the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Pandemic Electronic Benefit Transfer (P-EBT) program, part of the Families First Coronavirus Response Act.

Gov. Andy Beshear said the funding will relieve the stress some families have felt because of school closings and the loss of support services like free and reduced meals.

"Providing essential services like food has been my administration's priority during this challenging time," Gov. Beshear said. "While schools and social services groups across the state have led the way to feed their families, this emergency nutrition assistance funding will help students make up for the loss of in-school meals and help provide the healthy foods that ensure more positive outcomes for children."

The P-EBT program provides households an Electronic Benefits Transfer (EBT) card with benefits equal to the value of breakfasts and lunches a student was not able to receive during the days schools were closed. Households can use these benefits for grocery items eligible under the Supplemental Nutritional Assistance Program (SNAP).

In Kentucky, DCBS administers SNAP, which is funded by the USDA's Food and Nutrition Service.

Households eligible for P-EBT include those whose children attend public or private school and are certified to receive free or reduced-price school meals and children who attend schools that offer free school meals to all students. Even if a school was able to provide some meals during this period, a household is still eligible for P-EBT benefits.

CHFS Secretary Eric Friedlander said the program provides a vital support to families during challenging economic times.

“No child should go hungry, and this program will help ensure Kentucky children have access to the nutrition they need,” he said. “Eligible families should register for this benefit and give kids the healthy boost they need.”

P-EBT benefits are entirely federally funded and will provide up to $163 million in food assistance to up to 500,000 qualifying children. The plan will provide each eligible student with up to $313.50 for the time period of March through May to help with nutritional support during the time that schools have been closed during the pandemic.

Department of Education Interim Commissioner Kevin C. Brown said that approximately 75 percent of Kentucky students receive free or reduced-price meals.

“Schools do more than just teach our children, they also help provide nourishment,” Brown said. “Students used to receive these meals at school, and now we can provide that benefit at home, too.”

Friedlander said P-EBT will also provide a boost to local economies. In 2019, Kentucky SNAP customers received more than $765 million in federal assistance that directly benefitted their communities and area businesses, including farmers.

Families who already receive assistance can receive P-EBT in addition to other benefits their household may get. Children who already receive SNAP, Kentucky Transitional Assistance Program assistance, Kinship Care or Medicaid will automatically receive P-EBT on their EBT cards and do not need to apply separately. P-EBT benefits will be added to existing EBT cards no later than May 28. Families of all other children must complete a short online application and will be mailed an EBT card with instructions on how to activate and use their card. The online application will be available June 2 through June 30 at www.benefind.ky.gov (http://www.benefind.ky.gov).

Students who became eligible for free or reduced lunch after March 13 are eligible for P-EBT.

The deadline for new households to apply is June 30. To apply for P-EBT, visit www.benefind.ky.gov (http://www.benefind.ky.gov).

Kentuckians applying for or awaiting benefits related to COVID-19 should be aware of scammers who may try to get your important personal information. Sensitive information sought by deceptive people includes Social Security numbers, bank information, electronic benefits transfer (EBT) card numbers or PIN number and more. No government agency will contact you asking for this information in order to approve your benefits unless you began the application process yourself. If you are unsure if a request is legitimate, contact the agency responsible for the benefits directly, and report the scam to your caseworker.

Learn more about P-EBT at https://chfs.ky.gov/agencies/dcbs/Pages/dcbscvres.aspx (https://chfs.ky.gov/agencies/dcbs/Pages/dcbscvres.aspx). Learn about SNAP and other DCBS assistance programs at https://chfs.ky.gov/agencies/dcbs (https://chfs.ky.gov/agencies/dcbs) or by calling the DCBS Call Center at 1-855-306-8959.

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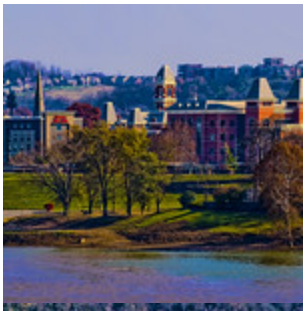
The Cabinet for Health and Family Services is home to most of the state's human services and healthcare programs, including the Department for Medicaid Services, the Department for Community Based Services the Department for Public Health, the Department for Aging and Independent Living and the Department for Behavioral Health, Developmental and Intellectual Disabilities. CHFS is one of the largest agencies in state government, with nearly 8,000 full- and part-time employees located across the Commonwealth focused on improving the lives and health of Kentuckians.

-  (https://www.flickr.com/photos/miamiboy/47184596121/in/pool-773339@N20)
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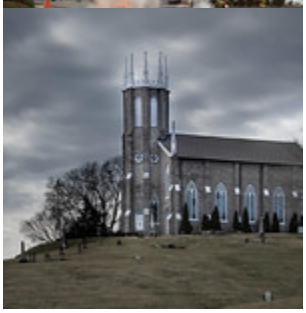
-  (https://www.flickr.com/photos/127721144@N05/46918072332/in/pool-773339@N20)
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