# After USDA Approval, Maryland to Provide Food to Approximately 427,000 Children Affected by COVID-19 School Closures

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*$49 Million in Additional Benefits for Marylanders Thanks to the Department of Human Services and Maryland State Department of Education's Joint Request to Federal Administration*

**BALTIMORE, MD** — The Maryland Department of Human Services (DHS), in conjunction with the Maryland State Department of Education, has secured approval from the USDA on its joint submission to operate a Pandemic Electronic Benefit Transfer (P-EBT) Program.

The Department of Human Services estimates that approximately 427,000 vulnerable children in Maryland will benefit from the P-EBT program for a combined value of over $49 million in estimated benefits. Monthly benefits will be calculated at the daily rate of $5.70 per child for each day the child's school was closed in a particular month.

"We are grateful to the Food and Nutrition Service of the USDA for their responsiveness and to the Maryland Department of Education and Local School Districts for their partnership in identifying and enrolling eligible students' families in the Pandemic-EBT program," said Maryland Department of Human Services Secretary Lourdes R. Padilla. "Additionally, we thank Governor Larry Hogan, who has led the way in thinking strategically and has championed our determined efforts to explore every opportunity that can help vulnerable Marylanders during this crisis."

Maryland households with children who have temporarily lost access to free or reduced-price school meals due to pandemic-related school closures will be eligible for Pandemic-EBT benefits. Because Maryland public schools were closed to students effective March 16, 2020, approved households will be able to obtain retroactive benefits as a result. March, April, and May benefits will be issued in June, and Pandemic-EBT benefits will continue to be issued for the duration that schools are closed due to COVID-19.

"While local school districts and agencies are distributing meals at over 600 emergency sites across the State, this additional P-EBT benefit will help sustain students and their families through the COVID-19 pandemic crisis," said Dr. Karen B. Salmon, Ph.D., State Superintendent of Schools. "This federal-state-local partnership led by the Department of Human Services will dramatically help maximize the nutritional well-being of children in Maryland."

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Maryland SNAP households qualifying for the Pandemic-EBT benefits will receive the additional benefits on their existing EBT card. Any SNAP recipients who have lost their EBT card may call the Maryland EBT Customer Call Center at 1-800-997-2222 to have a replacement card issued.

MSDE is working with DHS to identify the qualifying non-SNAP households and inform those families that they qualify for the Pandemic-EBT program. Additionally, DHS is mailing letters to these non-SNAP households along with a pre-populated form for the family to sign and return, confirming they would like to participate in the program.

“The Pandemic-EBT program offers Maryland an opportunity to provide additional nutritional resources to families who are losing access to free or reduced-price school meals as schools across the country close in response to COVID-19,” said Netsanet Kibret, Executive Director of the Family Investment Administration for DHS. “Our success at securing and providing the federal Pandemic-EBT program supports Governor Hogan’s continued efforts to keep people safe at home.”

This additional action taken by the Department is just the latest in a number of efforts it has made to secure every resource available to support Maryland residents during this unprecedented public health emergency. On April 23, the Department of Human Services announced it had secured federal approval from the USDA to operate a Disaster Household Distribution Program and is distributing 1,000,000 lbs of food to jurisdictions hit hardest by COVID-19. On April 17, the Department submitted a request to the USDA Food and Nutrition Service to expedite the capability for Maryland food retailers to accept online purchases made using SNAP benefits. The accelerated timeline will provide SNAP households in Maryland with the opportunity to purchase meals online from approved USDA retailers at no additional cost. On April 3, the Department of Human Services announced it would provide over $66 million in additional SNAP benefits to more than 319,000 Maryland households in response to COVID-19. Additionally, on March 27, the Department announced it had waived work requirements across all eligibility programs, extended the redetermination requirements for Marylanders receiving cash benefits for an additional six months, and secured approval from the USDA to extend certification periods and adjust reporting requirements for six months for Maryland’s SNAP benefit recipients.

The latest Departmental updates and COVID-related resources can be found on the Department of Human Services’ website at **http://dhs.maryland.gov/coronavirus**

*The Maryland Department of Human Services (DHS) is the state’s primary social service provider, annually reaching more than one million people. Through its 24 local departments of social services, the agency pursues opportunities to assist people in economic need, provide preventive services, and protect vulnerable children and adults in each of Maryland’s 23 counties and Baltimore City. Additional information may be found at **dhs.maryland.gov**.*

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