July 6, 2020

DHS Announces Pandemic Food Assistance Distribution Plan

Families to Receive Benefits Beginning July 14

(Des Moines, IA) The Iowa Department of Human Services (DHS) announces the distribution plan for $76,268,223 in Food Assistance benefits for Iowa Families. The *Families First CoronaVirus Act* allowed states to issue Food Assistance benefits to households with children in Pre-K through grade 12 who lost access to Free and Reduced Price School Meals due to pandemic-related school closures in Spring 2020.

There are two ways the 247,785 eligible children will receive their $307.80 in Food Assistance benefits. If their household received Food Assistance benefits anytime in April, May, or June, their benefits will be put on the household's EBT card on July 15, 2020. 94,354 children will receive benefits on the EBT card. The remaining 153,431 non-Food Assistance children will receive P-EBT cards in the mail between July 14 - 21, 2020.

Eligibility was determined with a detailed match through the Department of Education and Iowa schools that participate in the National School Lunch Program. Iowa is one of few states that did not require an application to receive these benefits. Any child who was an enrolled Pre-K through grade 12 student in the 2019-20 school year in either a public school or non-public school that participates in the National School Lunch Program and received Free and Reduced Price School Meals as of March 16, 2020, was deemed eligible.

"We hope to create advance awareness about the arrival of the P-EBT cards to prevent families from throwing the envelopes away, not realizing what they contain," said Janee Harvey, DHS Division Administrator of Adult, Child and Family Services. Cards will arrive in white envelopes addressed with the child's name from an Austin, TX return address beginning July 14, 2020. The cards inside will be white, with black font, with IOWA P-EBT printed at the top, and will bear the name of the eligible child. Families will need to follow the included instructions to activate the card.

Families with current EBT cards will have P-EBT benefits available on July 15, 2020 as well. These benefits will just be added to cards, and families do not need to do anything to activate the additional P-EBT funds. Harvey shared, "A family with three eligible children will receive over $900 dollars through P-EBT. That's a substantial boost during this time when many are struggling with unemployment and additional childcare costs. In cases where transportation or health concerns are a barrier to shopping in person, we hope families will take advantage of purchasing online. Both Wal-Mart and Amazon online are accepting P-EBT benefits."

“Ensuring a straightforward user process was top priority as we developed this program. Nonetheless, our call centers and stakeholder partners are prepared to answer questions about how to use or access these benefits,” Harvey stated.

A comprehensive FAQ document in English and Spanish, including eligibility information, and images of the card and envelope, are available on the DHS website here. We encourage the public to visit the website to find answers to all their P-EBT questions.

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Program Contact:
Tiffany Wickman
pebt@dhs.state.ia.us

Media contact:
Matt Highland
mhighla@dhs.state.ia.us
515-281-4848