Pandemic EBT food assistance program extended through June 15

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Families of children who received free and reduced-priced school meals, but who did not participate in SNAP are encouraged to apply

Preventing hunger has become a national and state priority during the coronavirus pandemic, and it continues to be a focus as economic activity increases.

The North Dakota Department of Human Services announced today that it is extending the application period for the Pandemic Electronic Benefits Transfer (P-EBT) food assistance program for those families whose children participated in the free and reduced-priced school meal program and who have not already applied for or received P-EBT benefits.

“We have already been able to provide Pandemic EBT food assistance help to three out of four qualifying North Dakota children. We are extending the application period through June 15, so that families who did not participate in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), but whose children participated in the child nutrition program at their local school have more time to apply,” said Economic Assistance Division Director Michele Gee.

Gee said families who participated in SNAP and whose children received free or reduced-priced school meals were automatically enrolled and have already received their P-EBT benefits.

Families who have not already applied for or received P-EBT benefits can apply online at www.nd.gov/dhs/info/covid-19/families.html. If a family is unable to complete an online application, the family should contact their children’s school for an application.

To date, the department has issued P-EBT benefits totaling $8.14 million to 29,900 North Dakota children. The department partnered with the North Dakota Department of Public Instruction and local schools to identify and notify eligible families. The agencies estimated that 39, 670 children ages 3-18 in North Dakota could benefit from the program.

Non-SNAP households with school-aged children who have already applied for P-EBT do not need to reapply.

Once approved, qualifying families will receive a benefit amount on a (SNAP) EBT card, which is a specialized debit card. The benefit amount is intended to replace the value of the food in free and reduced-priced school meals from March through May.

P-EBT benefits can only be used to purchase food items at SNAP-authorized retailers that typically include most grocery stores, participating farmers markets and other approved retailers.

Parents who have questions can contact the Department of Human Services' Economic Assistance Division at SNAP-PEBT@nd.gov or 701-328-2332.

The United States Department of Agriculture's Food and Nutrition Services (USDA FNS) approved North Dakota's P-EBT program application on May 1, and the state announced the program May 8 with an original deadline of May 31, 2020, which has now been extended.

Funding was authorized by the federal Families First Coronavirus Response Act. According to USDA Economic Research Service, food insecurity in North Dakota is below the U.S. average.

During the pandemic and the resulting temporary economic downturn, Human Services has taken other action to increase food assistance to prevent hunger. The agency issued extra SNAP benefits for March, April and May to qualifying SNAP households to ensure all SNAP households in the state received the maximum benefit amount for a household their size. This provided an extra $7.7 million in grocery buying power to about 16,000 SNAP households. Extra SNAP benefits will also be issued for June to qualifying SNAP households on June 18.

Many North Dakota's schools have been continuing to provide weekday breakfasts and lunches to their students, even though they are not required to do so when school is not in session. These meals, which are delivered or picked up at school, provide an important source of healthy, flavorful nutrition to North Dakota families.

North Dakotans who are having problems paying for food are encouraged to apply for SNAP online at www.nd.gov/dhs/info/pubs/application.html or by contacting their local human service zone office, formerly called county social service offices. Zone offices are temporarily restricting public access but are still providing services by phone, email and fax. Contact information is online at www.nd.gov/dhs/locations/countysocialserv/index.html.

SNAP typically assists about 23,000 low-income North Dakota households with their nutritional needs. On average, the monthly SNAP benefit per household is about $245 in North Dakota.

For more information about resources for individuals and families and the department's response to COVID-19, visit www.nd.gov/dhs/info/covid-19/index.html. For information about other resources supporting North Dakotans affected by the pandemic, visit ndresponse.gov/covid-19-resources.

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