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Frequently Asked Questions about Pandemic-EBT for School Nutrition Program and Other LEA Staff

Updated May 6, 2020

Note: This information will be updated as additional information becomes available.

1. What is Pandemic Electronic Benefit Transfer (P-EBT)?

P-EBT is a temporary food purchasing assistance benefit available in Virginia during school closures due to the public health emergency. The P-EBT assistance supports students who would otherwise have received free or reduced-price meals if schools were open. The P-EBT was authorized by the Families First Coronavirus Recovery Act of 2020 (FFCRA) and is administered by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), Food and Nutrition Service. The Virginia Department of Social Services (VDSS) and the Virginia Department of Education (VDOE) are working together with local school divisions to operationalize the program.

2. What is the purpose of P-EBT?

The purpose of the P-EBT benefit is to supplement existing food assistance and nutrition programs for low-income households during the pandemic. It does not replace meals provided through the school programs operating during unexpected closures, such as the Seamless Summer Option (SSO) and the Summer Food Service Program (SFSP), or the summer meal programs that will begin when the school year is over.

3. Which households are eligible for P-EBT benefits?

Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and non-SNAP households with students who have temporarily lost access to free or reduced-price school meals due to

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pandemic-related school closures are eligible for P-EBT. These households are eligible because they:

- include an eligible student(s) who, if not for the closure of their school during a public health emergency designation and due to concerns about a COVID-19 outbreak, would receive free or reduced-price school meals under the Richard B. Russell National School Lunch Act, as amended, and,
- the school the student(s) attended has been closed for at least five consecutive days during the public health emergency.

4. Which students are eligible for P-EBT benefits?

School-aged children who are students enrolled in a Virginia school that participates in the USDA meal programs and who have lost access to their free or reduced-price school meals due to school closures are eligible for P-EBT.

- Students who were determined by the LEA approving official to be eligible for free or reduced-price school meals through a meal application, direct certification, or categorical eligibility, such as homelessness, are eligible for P-EBT.
- Students enrolled in a school that provides both breakfast and lunch at no cost to all students through the Community Eligibility Provision (CEP) or Provision 2 (P2) (for both breakfast and lunch) are eligible for P-EBT.
 - Students enrolled in a P2 breakfast only school are not automatically eligible for P-EBT. Only students enrolled in P2 schools who were also determined free or reduced-price eligible for the National School Lunch Program are eligible for P-EBT.
- Students who are not eligible for free or reduced-price school meals and students who attend a school that does not participate in the USDA meal programs are not eligible for P-EBT.
- Children who are not enrolled in school are not eligible for P-EBT.

5. What data must local education agencies (LEAs) provide for the P-EBT?

Local school nutrition directors received information via SNP Memo 2019-2020-44 on April 27, 2020, with instructions and a required Excel template for the P-EBT data requirements for all eligible students. LEAs must use the VDSS required Excel template, which is attachment A to the memo, to submit the data. The data source should be the LEA's student information system (SIS) or point of sale system (POS) or both.

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There are 23 data fields in the VDSS template. The required data fields for all eligible students have an asterisk in the template and include the following: school division and school; eligible student name, date of birth, and date of eligibility; name of parent/guardian the student lives with; and, mailing address. Other data fields in the spreadsheet are optional. Do not delete columns from the VDSS template. If optional data is not available, leave the column(s) blank.

P-EBT benefits are a one time benefit for households eligible on the date the SFA creates the file. The SFA must send the completed file to Claudia Jackson, VDSS SNAP Benefits Manager, **via the confidential VDOE SSWS dropbox**. Copy Lynne Fellin, VDOE-SNP Technical Assistance Specialist, in the dropbox. Submit the data as soon as it is complete and no later than May 8, 2020.

6. What about students who become eligible after the file is submitted on May 8, 2020?

The SFA will submit the initial data file of eligible students enrolled at the time the SFA creates the file. The due date for this file is May 8, 2020. Because of changing household circumstances during the pandemic, students may be approved for free or reduced-price meals by application or direct certification after the first file is submitted. LEAs can submit a second file of newly eligible students by May 22 and a final file of newly eligible students by June 12, 2020. The data requirements will be the same for the subsequent files. Students determined eligible after March 13 will receive a pro-rated amount of P-EBT.

7. How will households be notified about the P-EBT?

VDSS and VDOE distributed a P-EBT press release to the major newspaper and television outlets throughout the state released May 8, 2020.

LEAs received a media release, similar to the one SFAs must send out at the beginning of each school year. LEAs should distribute the media release to all newspaper, TV, radio, and other outlets available to households in their area. The release will inform households of Virginia's participation in the P-EBT and provide program details, including who is eligible.

LEAs can access on the VDSS website a flyer targeted to households that will receive P-EBT. It briefly explains P-EBT, gives information about the card and how it can be used, and gives the phone number for households to call if they think they are eligible but do not receive benefits. LEAs should distribute this flyer, by any possible method, to all households that will receive P-EBT to help answer questions and avoid excessive contacts to the local

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school division. If possible, LEAs can email this flyer to eligible households in the P-EBT data file. Or, the flyer can be posted to the LEA website.

LEAs received a detailed Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) document targeted to households and P-EBT recipients. The LEA can post the Household FAQs to the LEA website. LEAs could also select certain messages from the FAQs to send out by robo-call, text message, or other channels to answer questions about P-EBT proactively.

8. If eligible, how much P-EBT will households receive?

Households will receive \$5.70 per eligible student per day up to the calculated maximum 66 days missed due to school closures. The same number of missed days will be used for all schools statewide, regardless of the school calendar. The VDSS will issue a maximum total benefit of \$376 per eligible student. Benefits will be prorated for students who became eligible for P-EBT after March 13, 2020.

9. When will P-EBT be available to households?

Eligible recipients will receive the P-EBT in the next two to six weeks. VDSS will issue the P-EBT assistance on a rolling basis. People living in the same area with children who attend the same schools may not receive benefits at the same time. Eligible households will receive benefits for the entire period their students were eligible, even if they do not receive benefits until the end of May or June.

Current SNAP households will receive P-EBT benefits for all eligible students on their existing EBT card, possibly as soon as the next two weeks. VDSS will send non-SNAP households benefits on a P-EBT card by mail in the next four to six weeks. If multiple eligible students live with the same parent or guardian at the same address, the household will receive one P-EBT card with benefits for all eligible students.

Instructions for how to activate the card will be included with the P-EBT card. Other questions about the P-EBT benefits, such as where it can be used and what recipients can buy with P-EBT are in the P-EBT flyer for households. Please distribute the flyer by any available means to households that will receive P-EBT.

10. What will happen to the P-EBT card if the household address is wrong?

The VDSS will use the mailing address from the P-EBT data file submitted by the LEA to mail EBT cards to non-SNAP households. If that address is not correct, VDSS will get a report of undeliverable cards. VDSS has provided a phone number for households to call if they think they are eligible and do not receive a card. Please refer households to the VDSS

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call center at (804) 726-7000. VDSS will also reach out to VDOE and local school divisions for help with address corrections.

11. What should households that need food right now do?

Students and families who are eligible to receive P-EBT should continue to participate in other food assistance programs, such as meals provided by schools. P-EBT does not replace other food assistance or meal programs.

Many schools and community locations are distributing meals now. To find current locations for SSO and SFSP meal distribution, parents and guardians should text FOOD or COMIDA to 877-877. LEAs should also provide meal distribution locations and times on their website and, if possible, include a link to the [2020 Summer Meals Site Finder](#).

If a family does not already receive SNAP benefits (food assistance), they should apply for assistance immediately by visiting the [CommonHelp website](#) or by calling 1-855-635-4370. For information about other food assistance, they may call 2-1-1.

12. What is the contact information for households that need help with setting up their card or have lost it?

Households that receive P-EBT benefits and have questions about setting up a PIN or how to use the card, they have three options: call 1-866-281-2448, logon to their [ConnectEBT](#) account, or on a mobile device, download the ConnectEBT app.

13. What should households that receive a card do if they do not want the P-EBT benefits?

Households that do not want to use their P-EBT benefits must destroy the P-EBT card when they receive it. P-EBT benefits are not transferrable. No one other than the identified parent or guardian may use the P-EBT card. Households should destroy the card by cutting through the magnetic stripe and disposing of it securely. If the parent/guardian changes their mind, the P-EBT benefits will continue to be available for up to 365 days. The household should call 1-866-281-2448 to access their P-EBT benefits for up to one year.