

## **Pennsylvania - Pandemic Electronic Benefit Transfer (P-EBT) – School Year 2021-2022**

### **What is P-EBT?**

Pandemic Electronic Benefit Transfer (P-EBT) is temporary funding to families of school-aged children who miss their free or reduced-price school meals due to being out of school for reasons related to COVID-19. The program was created by Congress and is funded through the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA). The Pennsylvania Department of Human Services (DHS) oversees the P-EBT program in Pennsylvania. P-EBT funds can only be used to purchase food.

### **Who is eligible to receive P-EBT?**

A student will receive P-EBT if **ALL** the following are true:

1. The school they are enrolled in participates in the National School Lunch Program (NSLP)
2. They are eligible to receive free or reduced-price school meals through the NSLP
3. Their school building had five consecutive school days of being closed or reduced attendance due to COVID-19 at some point during the school year
4. They missed their school meals because they were away from their classroom due to COVID-19

### **Who is not eligible to receive P-EBT through Pennsylvania?**

Children are not eligible to receive P-EBT if **any** of the following is true: they attend school in person; they attend a school that does not participate in the NSLP, such as home-schooled children or cyber schools; or they attend school in another state.

### **How does a cyber school differ from a virtual learning program implemented during the pandemic?**

Cyber schools are not eligible for P-EBT because they do not participate in the NSLP. They are run separately from the school building classrooms and the students are enrolled in the cyber program. Districts often call their programs cyber or virtual academies.

Virtual learning programs implemented during the pandemic refer to programs that schools put in place to extend learning from their school buildings to children who could not be in school during the pandemic. These students are enrolled in regular classrooms at the building and the building participates in the NSLP. For this reason, these virtual learning days are considered COVID-19-related since the child is missing their regular school meals at their building.

### **How much will students receive?**

For the 2021-2022 school year, P-EBT-eligible students will receive a benefit based on the number of days they were away from their school building due to COVID-19 as reported by their school. The federal government does not allow P-EBT benefits to be given to eligible students for days they received in-person instruction or for student absences for reasons other than COVID-19.

Important note: Benefit levels are individual and specific to a student's schedule and when their school building met the threshold. The average number of school days each month from September through May is 20 school days. The maximum daily rate for P-EBT during the 2021-2022 school year is \$7.10.

### **How will students receive P-EBT funds?**

Children whose families already receive Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits will receive the P-EBT benefits on the household's regular EBT card, if possible. Otherwise, benefits will be loaded on the P-EBT card the child received for last school year, if possible. If a child cannot be matched against a previous P-EBT issuance for the 2020-2021 school year, a new P-EBT card will be mailed to the student at the current address on file at school.

### **What role do schools play?**

Schools must first determine when each of their buildings had five consecutive school days of reduced attendance due to COVID-19 for the first time during the school year. No children at a school building can be considered for P-EBT benefits until the building meets this threshold.

Once a school building meets the "5-day" threshold, they count each student's days away from that building for COVID-19-related reasons for the remainder of the year. The school reports this data to the DHS. DHS will use the school data to calculate P-EBT benefits for the students.

### **When can P-EBT issuances be expected?**

- First Quarter Benefits for September – November 2021: Issued late June 2022
- Second Quarter Benefits for December 2021 – February 2022: Issued mid July 2022
- Third Quarter Benefits for March 2022 – May 2022: Issued early August 2022

**Can P-EBT cards be used at school to purchase school meals?** No. P-EBT benefits can only be used for the same purchases as Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), formerly known as food stamps. The card can only be used at approved food retailers, predominantly grocery stores and convenience stores. SNAP benefits and P-EBT cannot be used to purchase hot prepared foods, even at grocery stores and convenience stores.

### **Resources for parents**

Schools can only confirm for families that the P-EBT data they submitted to DHS is correct. They cannot estimate P-EBT benefit amounts or access the state's P-EBT system for the family.

**Families should direct all P-EBT inquiries to the Pennsylvania Department of Human Services.**

DHS maintains a P-EBT website for families: <https://www.dhs.pa.gov/coronavirus/Pages/P-EBT-Guide.aspx>. The DHS P-EBT customer support center for families can be reached by phone at 484-363-2137, or via online inquiry form: <https://forms.juvarre.com/forms/eb604f74-e01c-463e-82ea-04c416a5c9c5>

DHS is offering a new **Parent Portal** after P-EBT issuances begin for the 2021-2022 school year. The portal is in Pennsylvania's COMPASS system and will be linked on the DHS P-EBT website. **The direct URL is:** <https://www.compass.state.pa.us/Compass.Web/Public/pebtsearch> Parents can use the portal to check their child's eligibility for P-EBT and benefit amount. The portal also allows families to request P-EBT replacement cards in a timelier manner than in the past.

Other P-EBT resources for parents:

- Food Research & Action Center - <https://frac.org/pebt>
- Just Harvest - <https://justharvest.org/faq-about-pandemic-ebt-pebt-2021-2022-school-year-pennsylvania/>