

Massachusetts Expands P-EBT to Kids Under Six Receiving SNAP, Increases All P-EBT Benefits by 15%

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Department of Transitional Assistance

BOSTON –On Thursday, Massachusetts became the second state to receive federal approval to expand the Pandemic EBT (P-EBT) program to households with children under six years old who receive Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits. All P-EBT benefit amounts will also be increasing by 15%. Recent federal actions extended P-EBT to this new population and increased the benefit amount by 15%.

P-EBT promotes increased food security for families who participate in the United States Department of Agriculture’s National School Lunch Program (NSLP), covering the cost of school meals for students in remote or hybrid learning environments during the COVID-19 public health emergency.

An estimated 96,000 eligible children in Massachusetts under age six will receive their first P-EBT benefits for the next round at the end of March. The Department of Transitional Assistance (DTA) estimates the expansion of P-EBT for these children will bring provide more than \$100 million in additional federal dollars for Massachusetts families.

Households with children under six who get SNAP benefits will receive either \$136.40 a month or \$68.20 a month. In accordance with federal guidance, the benefit amount will be determined based on DESE K-12 education learning mode trends, and families will be notified of the benefit amount.

All future P-EBT benefits for children under age six will be issued on the 25th of each month for the duration of the program. They will also receive a special one-time payment in early April to retroactively cover the months of October through January.

Starting March 25th, eligible students in school grades K-12 will see the 15% increase in their P-EBT benefits. With the 15% increase, students in fully remote learning environments will now receive \$136.40 a month and those in hybrid learning environments will receive \$68.20. Based on federal rules, families may receive varying P-EBT amounts. A one-time special payment will be issued in early April to account for the increase going back to October.

“The COVID-19 public health crisis has exacerbated food insecurity for individuals, families, and communities that have historically experienced resource inequities,” said Secretary of Health and Human Services and COVID-19 Command Center lead Marylou Sudders. “Massachusetts continues to maximize every opportunity to tackle food insecurity across the state. These increased and extended benefits will help thousands of low-income households with young children stretch their limited resources to keep food on the table while meeting other basic needs.”

Massachusetts initially launched its P-EBT program in April 2020 when schools closed due to COVID-19, was one of a limited number of states to receive federal approval for September P-EBT benefits and was the first state in the nation to receive approval to continue P-EBT through school year 2020-2021. To date, P-EBT has brought more than \$396 million in federal dollars into the Commonwealth, supporting families of over 500,000 students and local grocery retailers.

P-EBT is jointly administered by DTA and the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE). This extension was also implemented in collaboration with the Department of Early Education and Care.

“P-EBT is an incredibly effective tool during the COVID-19 pandemic to help families directly purchase healthy, culturally appropriate food and support our local retailers and their employees,” said DTA Commissioner Amy Kershaw. “The approval of our plan to extend P-EBT to families with young children will support our youngest learners, for whom access to nutritious food is vital for healthy growth and development.”

“P-EBT benefits are an important support for families,” Elementary and Secondary Education Commissioner Jeffrey C. Riley said. “While districts continue to provide free school meals to all students, we know that being away from school makes these meals less convenient. This additional support for those students and for the Commonwealth’s youngest residents will help families during a difficult time.”

Households with children under age six who receive SNAP will receive their P-EBT benefits on their SNAP EBT card. Families can check their P-EBT balance on DTACconnect.com, the DTA Connect mobile app or by calling the number on the back of their card. P-EBT benefits can be used anywhere SNAP benefits are accepted, including online from Walmart, Amazon and ALDI. Learn more about P-EBT at MAP-EBT.org.

Families are encouraged to check their SNAP eligibility and apply online or over the phone at (877) 382-2363. SNAP benefits received on behalf of others (e.g., your child) are not considered in the public charge test. During the public health emergency, families are receiving additional monthly SNAP payments to bring them up to the maximum benefit level for their household size, which have temporarily been increased by 15%. That is \$430 a month for a household of two and \$782 a month for a household of four. Residents who receive SNAP can further expand their food budget by utilizing the Healthy Incentives Program that provides an additional \$40, \$60 or \$80 a month, depending on household size, when using SNAP to buy local produce from authorized HIP farm vendors.

Households with children under five, a new mom, or a pregnant or breastfeeding woman may also be eligible for the Women, Infants and Children (WIC) Program. WIC is a nutrition program that provides healthy foods, nutrition education, breastfeeding support, and referrals to healthcare and other services, free of charge, to Massachusetts families who qualify. Those who receive SNAP are automatically income eligible for WIC. WIC is not included in the public charge test and is available regardless of immigration or citizenship status. Families are encouraged to check their eligibility and apply online, or call (617)-721-6601 or (800) 942-1007 for more information. Households can stretch their food budget further by using their WIC benefits first – SNAP and P-EBT benefits roll over month to month, but WIC benefits do not.

DTA assists and empowers low-income individuals and families to meet their basic needs, improve their quality of life, and achieve long term economic self-sufficiency. DTA serves one in eight residents of the Commonwealth with direct economic assistance and food assistance, as well as workforce training opportunities.