

**DSS ADMINISTRATIVE LETTER ECONOMIC AND FAMILY SERVICES 15-2020
EFS_FNS_AL-15-2020**

Food and Nutrition Services

TO: County Directors of Social Services

ATTENTION: Food and Nutrition Services Managers and Supervisors

DATE: May 11, 2020

SUBJECT: Pandemic EBT Card Issuance

EFFECTIVE: Upon Receipt

PRIORITY: For Information and Action

I. GENERAL INFORMATION

The Families First Coronavirus Response Act of 2020 provides the Secretary of Agriculture authority to approve State agency plans for temporary emergency standards of eligibility and levels of benefits under the Food and Nutrition Act of 2008. One option is to issue Pandemic EBT (P-EBT) benefits to households with children who would receive free or reduced-price meals under the Richard B. Russell National School Lunch Act if not for the school closure. The North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) in collaboration with the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction (DPI) has submitted a plan and received approval from the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) to implement this option.

II. POLICY PROCEDURES

A. Eligible Households:

The State proposes to provide P-EBT benefits to FNS and non-FNS households with children who have temporarily lost access to free or reduced-price school meals due to pandemic-related school closures. These households are eligible for P-EBT because they:

- Include an eligible child or children, 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 child's school or district will be (or has been) closed for at least 5 consecutive days during a public health emergency designation and due to concerns about a COVID-19 outbreak.

B. Household Selection:

NC DHHS will utilize a file from DPI that contains a list of children who qualify to receive free or reduced-price lunch and breakfast across the state, including all children who attend Community Eligibility Provision (CEP) schools. The list will include charter school data if the charter school participates in free and reduced priced meals. The list will not include homeschooled children. The Community Eligibility Provision (CEP) is a non-pricing meal service option for schools and school districts in low-income areas. CEP allows the nation's highest poverty schools and districts to serve breakfast and lunch at no cost to all enrolled students without collecting household applications.

C. Allotment Amount:

The household allotment amount will be no less than the value of school meals at the free rate over the course of five (5) school days for each eligible child in the household. The value of the school meals is equal to the federal reimbursement rate for breakfast and lunch at the free rate, as specified by USDA. NC DHHS will use the date range of school closures based on Governor Coopers' Executive Order issued on March 14, 2020. Regular scheduled school closures such as spring breaks were taken into consideration when determining the value of the school meals that would be available during the school closures that began on March 16, 2020 and are scheduled through June 12, 2020.

NC DHHS will issue P-EBT benefits based on the number of days schools were closed in a given month, multiplied by the daily reimbursement rate for a free breakfast and a free lunch. Based on averages the estimate of amounts issued are as follows:

- March 16, 2020 through April 30, 2020 equals 34 school days X \$5.70 per day = \$194 per child.
- May 1, 2020 through June 12, 2020 equals 31 days X \$5.70 per day = \$177 per child.

D. Months of Assistance Tentative Issuance Schedule:

- The first issuance (34 days) is targeted for the weeks of:
 - May 12, 2020 for existing FNS households.
 - May 13, 2020 for non-FNS households.
- The second issuance (31 days) is targeted for early June.
- Children enrolled in Free or Reduced Lunch between December 2019 and March 31, 2020 won't be picked up until the 2nd issuance cycle. They will receive all 65 days of benefits during this cycle.
- Children enrolled in Free or Reduced Lunch after March 31, 2020 will be picked up in an additional catch-up cycle targeted for late June or early July.
- All issuances will be staggered to minimize the impact on the grocery store supplies.

E. Issuing P-EBT Benefits to Households:

1. Children currently in an active FNS case for one of the P-EBT benefit months:

- The associated NC FAST case numbers for each child/group of siblings will be identified. These FNS cases will receive a supplement based on the household's existing EBT card/account information and the number of children in the household

that matched with the DPI file. The calculated benefit amount is based on the number of children in the household and the daily cost rate for school breakfast and lunch.

- That file will be submitted to NC DHHS' EBT vendor and the total benefit will be loaded onto that household's existing EBT account.
- There are 19,304 households that will receive some benefits on an existing EBT card and some benefits on a new P-EBT card. The P-EBT benefits cannot be moved to the existing EBT card.

2. Children not in an active FNS case for the given P-EBT benefit month:

- NC DHHS will utilize the data contained in the DPI file to roll confirmed sibling sets and groups of siblings into consolidated "household" records.
- Those household records will then be batched and sent directly to our EBT vendor to create new EBT accounts.
- The calculated benefit amount for the associated benefit month will then be loaded onto the P-EBT cards via a batch file to the EBT vendor.
- The P-EBT benefits will be available for use for 365 days from date of issuance. Unused benefits will be expunged after 365 days.
- A P-EBT card along with a notice explaining the P-EBT program will be mailed to the household based on the address listed in the DPI file. The P-EBT card will be issued in the Head of Household's name received from the DPI file. The P-EBT card will look different from the standard EBT cards. The P-EBT card will be a plain white card with North Carolina and P-EBT on the front.



Front

Back

Note: P-EBT issuances for nonactive FNS households will be available in ebtEDGE. This information **will not** be available in NC FAST.

- P-EBT cards cannot be assigned authorized representatives.
- P-EBT households not receiving active FNS will receive a notice to inform them of the following information (notice attached):
 - How the benefit amount was determined.
 - The Household's phone number.
 - How to activate the P-EBT card.
 - How to pin or check the P-EBT card balance.
 - Things that can or cannot be purchased with the P-EBT card.
 - How the P-EBT card works.
 - Households that wish to decline the benefits may simply destroy the cards.
 - Expungement of unused benefits will occur at the end of 365 days.

- Both FNS and non-FNS households will receive text messages at the phone number furnished in the DPI file. The text will inform the household that P-EBT benefits have been issued.

F. Activating and Pinning P-EBT cards, Replacing Lost, Stolen or Damaged EBT Cards.

1. Pinning P-EBT cards:

P-EBT cards will have a mailer insert that gives the households instructions on how to activate and PIN their card upon receipt. When activating the P-EBT card the client will be asked for the Date of Birth of their youngest school age child who receives free or reduced Lunch. Note: If there are multiple children in the household it may be necessary to try each child's date of birth to successfully activate the P-EBT card. A Copy of the mailer is attached to this letter.

This is the screen the clients will see using the mobile app or the cardholder portal.

Example: The household consist of 2 school age children; one is 13 years old (DOB:04/04/2007) and one is 15 years old (DOB: 01/01/2005) and both receive Free or Reduced Lunch. The Date of Birth used would be the Date of Birth of the 13-year-old.

2. Replacing Lost, Stolen, or Damaged P-EBT Cards.

For replacement of lost, stolen, or damaged P-EBT cards recipients should contact the NC EBT Call Center at 1-888-622-7328.

G. Reports and Household Inquiries.

1. Reports.

- NC FAST Reports:** The report listing **all** households that received P-EBT benefits will be housed in NC FAST Help. The name of the report is "**P-EBT Issuance 052020**". The P-EBT reports will contain a special password that will be provided to counties securely. The report contains the following information:

- County
- Benefit Month
- DPI Family ID
- SUI Number
- School Name
- Child SSN
- Child First Name
- Child Last Name

- Child Date of Birth
- Phone Number
- Parent First Name
- Parent Last Name
- Street Address
- City
- State
- Zip

Note: The information provided on the P-EBT reports is for county use **only** and **cannot** be released to callers or to clients who come into the office.

- b. ebtEDGE Report:** The Card Status Report Undelivered County – EBTDS210-4 report is a daily report that list all EBT cards returned as undeliverable to FIS. <https://portal.ebtedge.com/govreports/ReportList.aspx> The non-FNS P-EBT cards will also be included on this report.

2. Card Status Report Undelivered County – EBTDS210-4.

The county should use all available resources such as existing NC FAST or county contact information as well as working with the local school system to attempt to locate a valid address for the households.

- a.** P-EBT Log: the county document all return P-EBT cards that show on the EBT Undeliverable Report. The county must detail what actions were taken to resolve the bad address.
- b.** Check P-EBT report or the returned notice to determine if a valid phone number is listed.
- If valid phone number is listed attempt to contact the household to obtain an updated address. Update the address in ebtEDGE and reissue a new card to the household. Document on the P-EBT log.
 - If no valid phone number is listed, check the NC FAST system for current participation in other programs and any prior contact information. Document all attempts to obtain an updated address on the P-EBT log. Take no further action at this time.

3. Non-FNS household does not want to participate in the P-EBT program.

Inform the household to destroy the P-EBT card and that the benefits will be available for 365 days, if they change their mind, they may call the call center to request a replacement card at any time prior to the expungement of the benefits. Document on the P-EBT log that the client does not wish to participate and was instructed to destroy the P-EBT card.

4. Additional information.

Additional information is available on the COVID-19 Questions and Answers attached to the Dear County Director Letter EFS-FNSEP-07-2020 at <https://files.nc.gov/ncdhhs/documents/files/dss/dcdl/economicsservices/EFN-07-2020.pdf>

III. IMPLEMENTATION INSTRUCTIONS

This policy is effective upon receipt for all active FNS households and all non-active FNS households matched from the Department of Public Instruction. Submit any questions regarding this information to: pebtquestions@dhhs.nc.gov

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "David Locklear". The signature is written in a cursive style.

David Locklear, Deputy Director
Economic and Family Services

DL/rc

Attachments (3)

- P-EBT Notice English
- P-EBT Notice Spanish
- P-EBT Log