

FAQs on Pandemic-EBT for School Year 2020-2021 and Summer 2021

This resource is based on USDA guidance memos on implementing Pandemic-EBT (P-EBT) for students as authorized by the Families First Coronavirus Response Act and extended by the American Rescue Plan Act through the end of the COVID-19 public health emergency, including the summer following any school year covered by the public health emergency declaration. This resource reflects guidance available as of May 11, 2021.

Please refer to the US Department of Agriculture's [guidance on P-EBT](#) and your state agency for additional information.

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Relevant Legislation

1. What is the Families First Coronavirus Response Act (H.R 6201)?

The Families First Coronavirus Response Act (FFCRA) provides temporary new authority and broad flexibility for the USDA and states to adapt the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and child nutrition programs to address many people's food needs during the current public health and economic emergency triggered by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Signed on March 18, 2020, the FFCRA created Pandemic EBT (P-EBT), a new benefit that allows states to provide families whose children rely on free or reduced-price school meals with resources to purchase food when schools are closed for more than 5 days due to COVID-19.

There are a number of resources available summarizing the FFCRA:

- The House Appropriations Committee has posted [a summary](#) of the FFCRA.
- The Center on Budget and Policy Priorities has posted a detailed [resource](#) on P-EBT and the SNAP flexibilities and waivers authorized under FFCRA.
- The Kaiser Family Foundation developed [a summary](#) of the key provisions of the FFCRA.

2. What is the Continuing Appropriations Act, 2021, and Other Extensions Act (P.L 116-159, H.R 8337)

This is a federal law that provides continuing funding for Fiscal Year (FY) 2021 to federal agencies and extends expiring federal programs, including P-EBT. The P-EBT program was set to expire on September 30, 2020. The Act not only extended the program through September 30, 2021 (or the full 2020-2021 school year), but it also does the following:

- Expands the program to cover certain children participating in child care programs,
- Expands the program to US territories such as Puerto Rico,
- Provides full administrative funding to the program's implementation in SY2020-2021,

- Expands the conditions for P-EBT eligibility to include not just the physical closure of schools for 5 consecutive days but also schools and child care programs operating at reduced in-person attendance or hours for at least 5 consecutive days, and
- Provides additional flexibilities to states to simplify administration of the program, such as giving states the option to calculate average monthly benefits using the best available data for children attending school in-person part of the time and virtual part of the time.

See the summary of the Act [here](#).

3. **What is the Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2021 (H.R. 133)?**

Though primarily intended to maintain funding to continue government operations, this law offers critical amendments to the authorizing language for P-EBT. In particular, the law:

- Clarifies the language on the simplifying assumptions that states can make in determining benefit levels for students given the complexity of school schedules during School Year (SY) 2020-2021.
- Deems all children under the age of six who reside in households participating in SNAP to be enrolled in a covered child care program and offers additional ways to qualify these children for P-EBT based on the schedule of schools near where they reside.

4. **What is the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021 (P.L. 117-2, H.R. 1319)?**

The American Rescue Plan Act is a COVID-19 relief bill that became law on March 11, 2021. Among its many provisions, the American Rescue Plan does the following as it relates to P-EBT:

- Extends P-EBT through any school year in which there is a public health emergency declaration due to COVID-19,
- Extends P-EBT through the summer following any school year in which there is a public health emergency, up to 90 days, and
- Expands P-EBT for children under the age of six in child care programs to the U.S. territories.

Previously, P-EBT benefits were only available for school days during the school year through September 30, 2021. The American Rescue Plan deems all schools and child care programs closed due to COVID-19 during the summer following the school year with a COVID-19 public health emergency.

P-EBT Basics

5. **What is Pandemic EBT (P-EBT)?**

Pandemic EBT (P-EBT) is a state option to provide a grocery benefit to children who have temporarily lost access to free and reduced-price meals at school due to COVID-19. It is administered in each state through a collaboration of the agencies that administer SNAP and the school meals programs. The FFCRA permitted information sharing between these agencies and school food authorities regarding eligible students. For more on how states can opt in to offer P-EBT benefits, see [Q20-21](#).

For students in households that participate in SNAP, P-EBT benefits are often issued on the household's existing SNAP electronic benefit transfer (EBT) card. However, this may vary depending on the state plan. For eligible students in non-SNAP households, a new EBT card is issued.

6. What P-EBT guidance is available from USDA for SY20-21 and Summer 2021?

- On January 29, 2021, USDA issued new [guidance](#) superseding the November 16, 2020 [guidance](#) to help clarify what should be in state P-EBT plans. The guidance included an updated [FAQ](#) and [template state plan](#). See the USDA webpage [here](#) for additional details.
- On April 26, 2021, the USDA issued [guidance](#) on the issuance of P-EBT benefits for Summer 2021. This included a [policy memo](#), [Q&A](#), and [template state plan](#).

P-EBT Eligibility

7. Who is eligible for P-EBT in SY20-21 and Summer 2021?

For SY20-21, P-EBT benefits are available to students who attend schools participating in the National School Lunch Program (NSLP) or School Breakfast Program (SBP) that are closed or operating with reduced attendance or hours for at least five consecutive days due to COVID-19. This includes traditional public schools, public charter schools, and private schools as long as the school participates in the NSLP.

Additionally, students must meet one of the following criteria:

- Eligible for free or reduced-price school meals in SY20-21. Eligibility may be determined by school meal eligibility application or direct certification at any time during the school year.
- Attend a school that offers meals at no charge to all students through the Community Eligibility Provision (CEP) or Provision 2 or 3.
- Directly certified, determined as Other Source Categorically Eligible, or certified by school meal eligibility application for SY19-20 *and* the school/district has not made a new school meal eligibility determination for the child in SY20-21.

Children under the age of six may qualify for P-EBT benefits if they are enrolled in a school that participates in the NSLP and are determined eligible. This includes children in kindergarten or preschool grades as well as children enrolled in Head Start programs administered by a school and serving meals through the NSLP.

For Summer 2021, all schools participating in the NSLP – including year-round schools -- are considered closed due to COVID-19, so P-EBT benefits are available for each weekday of the summer break to all students who qualify for benefits during SY20-21. This includes:

- All students who received P-EBT in SY20-21 or would have been eligible for benefits during SY20-21 had their school been closed or operating at reduced in-person attendance or hours,
- Students who graduated at the end of SY20-21, and
- Students who are newly determined to be eligible for free or reduced-price school meals. For more on this, see [Q10](#).

8. Who is *not* eligible for P-EBT in SY20-21 and Summer 2021?

For SY20-21, P-EBT benefits are *not* available to students who:

- Attend in-person class and have access to meals at schools. Students are only eligible for benefits covering days when they do not attend school in person or who attend in person but do not receive meals at school, such as students who only attend half days in person.
 - However, students attending school in person may receive P-EBT benefits if the state is utilizing simplifying assumptions and issues benefits based on the most common school

schedule or learning model rather than based on individual students' schedules. For more on simplifying assumptions, see [Q18](#).

- Are no longer enrolled in a school that participates in the NSLP or SBP, including students who are being homeschooled for SY20-21.

For Summer 2021, students who would have been eligible for P-EBT during SY20-21 if not for attending in-person classes **may** receive P-EBT benefits over the summer break, as noted in [Q7](#). Students who are enrolled in schools that are newly approved to begin operating under CEP or Provision 2 or 3 in SY21-22 are **not** eligible for P-EBT in Summer 2021 **unless** the individual student is determined to be income-eligible or categorically eligible for free or reduced-price school meals.

9. Is P-EBT available to children under the age of six who are not yet in school?

Yes. Under the [Continuing Appropriations Act](#), Congress authorized the expansion of P-EBT to children under age six who are not yet in school and meet certain criteria. Through the [Consolidated Appropriations Act](#), Congress clarified that all children under the age of six who are not yet in school and reside in a household participating in SNAP are eligible for P-EBT if they reside in an area where schools are closed or operating at reduced attendance or hours for at least five consecutive days due to COVID-19. Children in SNAP households may also be eligible if their child care program is closed or operating at reduced attendance or hours for at least five consecutive days due to COVID-19.

States must submit and receive approval for a separate plan or plan amendment in order to distribute P-EBT benefits to children under the age of six who are not yet in school.

On January 29, 2021, USDA issued guidance on P-EBT eligibility for Children in Covered Child Care Facilities. On April 26, 2021, USDA issued guidance on distributing P-EBT benefits to children under the age of six during Summer 2021. Additional information can be found in the [FAQ](#).

10. Are new income eligibility determinations required for SY20-21 and/or Summer 2021?

For SY20-21, no, states and school food authorities are **not** required to obtain new school meal eligibility applications or make new income eligibility determinations for all students. However, states must utilize the best available data to determine students' free or reduced-price eligibility status and ensure that they have the most recent and accurate free or reduced-price student data.

Many schools and districts are serving school meals through the Summer Food Service Program (SFSP) or NSLP Seamless Summer Option (SSO) in SY20-21. These schools can issue P-EBT benefits using SY19-20 free or reduced-price eligibility data if they did not collect applications for SY20-21 like usual. These schools are still required to ensure that P-EBT benefits are not issued to children who have already graduated from the school or no longer attend the school.

States are required to make sure that children who were *not* income-ineligible for P-EBT in SY19-20 but **are** now eligible are allowed to establish their eligibility for P-EBT with any available eligibility determination tools such as applications, direct certification, or categorical eligibility systems.

For Summer 2021, eligibility determinations for SY20-21 (including those carried forward from SY19-20) will carry forward through the summer. However, states must also provide an opportunity for families to establish eligibility for P-EBT throughout the summer. States are encouraged to utilize traditional school meal eligibility applications and use P-EBT administrative funds to support school food authorities in maintaining staff at least part-time to continue processing applications. If this is not possible, states may collect applications throughout the summer, process them at the end of summer, and issue retroactive benefits for the full summer to students who qualify. Still, states are encouraged to distribute benefits to newly eligible students prior to the end of summer.

11. Does the school need to be closed for five consecutive days for students to receive P-EBT benefits?

For SY20-21, if a school is closed or operates at reduced in-person attendance or hours for at least five consecutive school days, then any eligible student at that school is eligible for P-EBT benefits on the days the child does not receive a meal at school as part of an in-person instructional day. For example, a free or reduced-price-eligible student who attends school in-person on Tuesdays and Thursdays and attends virtually on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays would be eligible for P-EBT benefits for the three virtual learning days that week.

For Summer 2021, all schools are considered to be closed due to COVID-19.

12. Are students eligible for P-EBT if schools are closed for weekends or regularly scheduled holidays or school breaks?

For SY20-21, students may **not** receive P-EBT benefits for regularly scheduled non-school days like weekends, holidays, or breaks like spring break. P-EBT benefits are only available when the closure is due to COVID-19. The only exception is if a planned school break is extended due to the public health emergency, in which case eligible children can receive P-EBT benefits.

For Summer 2021, all schools are considered to be closed due to COVID-19. Weekends are still not included, only weekdays.

13. May students receive both P-EBT and meals from their school or another organization through the SFSP or SSO for days when schools are operating virtually or closed, including during Summer 2021?

Yes, students may receive both P-EBT benefits and meals through the summer meals programs – SFSP or SSO – for days when they are not in school, including during Summer 2021. Children may also receive meals through these programs for weekends and regularly scheduled holidays and school breaks when P-EBT benefits are not available.

P-EBT Benefit Levels and Issuance

14. When do benefits begin? Can states issue benefits going back to the beginning of SY20-21?

For SY20-21, states are encouraged to create a plan that will cover the full 20-21 school year based on the latest guidance.

In states that did not already distribute benefits through September 30, 2020 under the initial authorization of P-EBT, the state plan for SY20-21 may include distribution of benefits going back to the beginning of the school year.

For states that already distributed benefits through September 30, 2020, the benefits may go back to October 1, 2020. However, these states have the option of amending their plans to take advantage of the additional flexibilities in the January 2021 guidance.

Benefits for children under the age of six who are not yet in school may not go back any earlier than October 1, 2020.

Given that most states will not be approved to begin distributing benefits until well after the beginning of the school year, the USDA encourages states to distribute the retroactive benefits for earlier months in two or more installments.

For Summer 2021, the USDA encourages states to distribute benefits in 2-3 increments throughout the summer, as close as possible to the month the benefits are intended to cover. The exact timing of the benefits is subject to the approval of state plan amendments for Summer 2021.

15. When do benefits begin for children who are certified as eligible for free or reduced-price meals after SY20-21 P-EBT benefits have already started being issued?

Newly enrolled students such as kindergartners and students who were not eligible for free or reduced-price meals in SY19-20 but have become eligible during SY20-21 may receive retroactive benefits going back to the beginning of the school year. The exact timing depends on state procedures for obtaining new eligibility information from school food authorities and issuing new P-EBT cards.

States using mechanisms to determine eligibility other than applications are required to describe these in their implementation plans and include how their alternative approaches makes use of the best feasibly available data and why they are needed.

Students who are determined eligible for free or reduced-price school meals during Summer 2021 should begin receiving benefits during the summer, but state plans may involve students receiving retroactive benefits for the full summer once their application is processed at the start of SY21-22. See [Q10](#) for more.

16. Are there requirements for when and how benefits are issued to students and when a state may issue advance benefits?

For SY20-21, states may issue benefits in schedules that work best for them, whether that is in advance of the benefit month or retroactively. However, advance benefits may only be issued up to two months at a time. For example, in December, a State may determine benefit levels for January 1st through February 28th. States must reassess student schedules no less frequently than once every two months.

For Summer 2021, states are encouraged to issue benefits in two or three distributions over the summer but may choose a schedule that works best for them.

17. How much is the full benefit level per child per day during SY20-21 and Summer 2021?

The Presidential [Executive Order on Economic Relief](#) announced on January 22, 2021 required USDA to increase the value of the P-BET benefit by 15%. Accordingly, USDA added the value of the free reimbursement for an afterschool snack to the value of the free reimbursement for school breakfast and lunch.

Now, the maximum benefit level is \$6.82 per child per day in the contiguous United States, including the District of Columbia. The daily benefit level is higher in Alaska, Hawaii, and the U.S. territories where the school meals reimbursement rates are higher. In Alaska, the benefit level is \$10.99 per child per day, and in Hawaii and the U.S. territories, the benefit level is \$7.97 per child per day.

The maximum level is the same for school children and eligible children under six who are not yet in school. This is also the daily benefit level for all children during Summer 2021.

States are allowed to retroactively apply the new higher benefit level to the beginning of SY2020-2021 (or July 1, 2020 through June 30, 2021).

A student who has already received P-EBT benefits with an approved SY20-21 plan is eligible to receive a supplemental benefit (through a separate issuance or by increasing the next scheduled benefit level) to offset the difference between the new higher benefit and the previous benefit level.

Simplifying Assumptions Regarding Student Eligibility, School Schedules, and Summer Break

18. How can states use simplifying assumptions to establish state or regional benefit levels during SY20-21?

USDA provides a number of examples for allowable assumptions that states may make when determining benefit levels.

- For children who are **fully virtual**: states may issue a fixed P-EBT benefit amount across months for as long as the virtual status continues. However, states must reassess school operating status at least once every two months and revise the standard benefit level if the situation or schedule has changed since the state plan was approved.
- For children with **hybrid schedules**: states may calculate and issue a uniform P-EBT benefit based on the average number of virtual days, the most common schedule, or some other representative number of virtual learning days. The state must provide justification for its choices.
- In cases where it is not possible to determine if children have hybrid or fully virtual schedules, states are allowed to use the school's default or predominant learning model to issue a uniform benefit for all eligible children in a given school. For example, in a school where the default learning model is 100% virtual instruction, the State may issue a P-EBT benefit for each instructional day to all of the school's eligible children, even if some children attend class in-person on certain days.
 - The state is required to explain in its P-EBT plan why a uniform benefit for all children in the same school is a necessary simplification, and why the state cannot collect the student-level data necessary to issue separate hybrid and fully virtual benefits.

19. How can states determine the length of the summer break for Summer 2021 benefits? Can any simplifying assumptions be used, or do states have to issue benefits to students based on the exact length of the break in each district?

The USDA does **not** expect states to issue benefits for Summer 2021 based on the exact length of the break in each district, though that is an option.

The USDA conducted an analysis of scheduled summer breaks for Summer 2021 using publicly available calendars for the largest school districts in every state. The USDA determined that the median number of weekdays in the summer break among the sample school districts is 55. The USDA invites states to issue a uniform benefit for all children in the state using the daily benefit level of \$6.82 and the median summer break length of 55 days. This would translate to a standard benefit level of \$375 per child for the full summer. Because the daily benefit level is higher outside of the contiguous U.S., the standard summer benefit in Alaska would be \$604 per child, and in Hawaii and the U.S. territories it would be \$438 per child.

States may also calculate their own standard benefit level. The state must explain their methodology in their Summer 2021 P-EBT plan. The USDA expects states to tie the length of the summer break to an enrollment-weighted average or median of a representative sample of actual 2021 calendars of districts within the state.

Per USDA guidance, if a state uses the standard benefit level or calculates its own, it is permissible for students to receive P-EBT benefits for the short periods of time that the standard summer break may overlap with the end of SY20-21 or the beginning of SY21-22. It is also permissible to give the standard summer benefit to any students who attend year-round schools.

Regardless of how a state determines the length of the summer break, it cannot exceed 90 days.

State Plans and Administration

20. What must states do to implement P-EBT in SY20-21?

States must develop and submit implementation plans to USDA for approval. USDA will not approve amendments to SY19-20 P-EBT implementation plans to serve children in SY20-21. Amendments to existing approved P-EBT implementation are allowed only under the following conditions:

- States are only allowed to correct their SY19-20 approved P-EBT plan or Fall SY20-21 plan (for those who were previously approved to distribute benefits through September 30, 2020) if the states made errors in benefit eligibility or benefit amount determinations. If a child misses a benefit or receives a much lower benefit due to such errors, the state can issue a new or corrected benefit amount.
- States that were not previously approved to extend P-EBT operation through the end of September 30, 2020 (or August 1 through September 30, 2020) are now allowed to include those months in their new full SY20-21 P-EBT implementation plan.

State plans submitted to USDA are required to include the following types of information:

- Ways of identifying, confirming and monitoring schools' eligibility for P-EBT participation;
- The simplifying assumptions the state will use and the justification for using those, including proposed measures to ensure program integrity in utilizing the assumptions;
- The estimated total amount of administrative funds the state needs to carry out the full P-EBT implementation plan or amendment;
- The date range covered by the state plan or amendment including the estimated total amount of P-EBT benefits that will be issued within the date range;
- The total number of children that will receive P-EBT disaggregated by SNAP and non-SNAP households;
- The state's public campaign strategy for communicating information to both the general public and P-EBT participants; and
- How the state will address over-issuance issues including benefit issuance for children that already graduated in SY19-20 or other non-students.

We recommend states continue to conduct robust public outreach campaigns using multiple languages and strategies to maximize P-EBT program participation among eligible households with children. Outreach is especially vital to identify eligible non-SNAP participating households with children and those newly eligible children for the program.

Please contact the USDA for any additional guidance in the development of your state's P-EBT implementation plan.

21. What must states do to implement P-EBT in Summer 2021?

States must submit an amendment to their SY20-21 P-EBT plans. States cannot submit a plan for Summer 2021 without an approved SY20-21 plan. The state plan amendment for Summer 2021 must include:

- Whether the state will use the USDA's standard benefit, calculate its own standard benefit, or issue district-specific benefits;

- If calculating its own standard benefit, the methodology used to calculate it;
- The estimated total dollar amount of P-EBT benefits to be distributed to school children and non-school children under age six for Summer 2021;
- The estimated total number of children, separated by school children and non-children under age six, to whom the state will issue P-EBT benefits for Summer 2021;
- The tentative issuance schedule; and
- How the state will identify eligible children, including children who become newly eligible during Summer 2021.

22. Is there administrative funding available for P-EBT implementation support for SY20-21? If so, how will the funding be administered?

Yes, there is full administrative funding for P-EBT for SY2020-2021 for each state authorized by Congress under the Continuing Resolution Act of 2021.

Each state SNAP agency will receive funding to cover P-EBT administration costs. Funding will cover necessary, reasonable, and allowable costs incurred between October 1, 2021, and September 30, 2021.

States are eligible for retroactive reimbursement of administrative expenses to the extent that the expenses are tied to retroactive FY20 benefit issuance in the FY21 timeframe. One instance of such retroactive FY20 benefit issuance in FY21 is if a state made errors in its SY19-20 P-EBT plan and needs to amend or correct its plan in the current school year to serve children who have missed or received reduced benefit levels.

23. Are states authorized to claim 100% of the administrative funds available for expenditures that were incurred before October 1, 2020?

No. USDA clarified that, as a general principle of federal grants management and appropriations law, grant funds are only available for costs incurred during the performance period of the award. The performance period of an award can't begin before its authorization and appropriation are enacted. Therefore, 100% of P-EBT administrative funds are limited to costs incurred in FY21.

24. Is there administrative funding available for P-EBT implementation support for Summer 2021?

Yes. Funding will cover necessary, reasonable, and allowable administrative costs incurred during Summer 2021 by federal, state, and other agencies as well as local units and schools.

25. How will P-EBT be administered in eligible US territories such as Puerto Rico?

USDA stated that basic P-EBT implementation guidance will apply to eligible U.S territories and they will work directly with impacted territories to meet core objectives and the administrative requirements of the program.

Acronyms Used in this Resource:

- EBT: Electronic Benefit Transfer
- FFCRA: Families First Coronavirus Response Act
- FY: Fiscal Year
- NSLP: National School Lunch Program
- P-EBT: Pandemic Electronic Benefit Transfer
- SBP: School Breakfast Program
- SFSP: Summer Food Service Program
- SNAP: Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program
- SSO: Seamless Summer Option
- SY: School Year
- USDA: United States Department of Agriculture

Additional Resources:

FAQs on Pandemic EBT (P-EBT) for Children in Covered Child Care Facilities

- <https://bestpractices.nokidhungry.org/resource/faqs-pandemic-ebt-p-ebt-children-covered-child-care-facilities>

FAQs on SNAP Emergency Allotments and Other Flexibilities

- <https://bestpractices.nokidhungry.org/resource/faqs-snap-emergency-allotments-and-other-flexibilities>

Summary of Current COVID-19 Child Nutrition Program Response Nationwide Waivers

- <http://bestpractices.nokidhungry.org/resource/summary-current-covid-19-child-nutrition-program-response-nationwide-waivers>