



**Pandemic Electronic Benefit Transfer Program Frequently Asked Questions  
For Local Education Agencies That Participate in the National School Lunch Program  
May 13, 2020**

**Q1: What is P-EBT?**

**A:** The federal Families First Coronavirus Response Act of 2020 provides temporary benefits, referred to as Pandemic Electronic Benefit Transfer (P-EBT), to families of school-aged children who would receive free or reduced-priced meals if school was in session.

For each day school is closed, families of school-aged children certified as free or reduced eligible will receive the equivalent of the free high rate for lunch and the severe need rate for breakfast. Specifically, a family will receive \$5.70 for each eligible school-aged child in their family for each day school has been closed since March 16, 2020.

**Q2: When will benefits be issued?**

**A:** Benefits will be issued in three waves beginning in mid-May.

- **Phase 1:** Direct Certification population, which are students receiving any of the following benefits: Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), or Directly Certified Medical Assistance (DCMA).
- **Phase 2:** Students attending LEAs using the full Pennsylvania Student Eligibility System (PA-SES) by PrimeroEdge, including students attending Community Eligibility Provision (CEP) schools or students individually enrolled and marked as eligible for free or reduced-priced meals.
- **Phase 3:** Students attending LEAs not using the full PA-SES, including CEP schools, and newly enrolled students will receive benefits later in June.

A detailed timeline is available in the PDE Division of Food and Nutrition (DFN) memo, Pandemic Electronic Benefit Transfer Next Steps and Timeline, dated May 11, 2020, located on PEARS Download Forms, COVID-19 Section.

**Q3: Will P-EBT cards be sent to all families who are receiving Direct Certification, free, and reduced-price meals?**

**A:** P-EBT is for all families with school-aged children that are eligible for free and reduced-price meals. If they already receive benefits through SNAP or TANF and currently have an EBT card, they will not be issued a new card. The existing card will be loaded with the additional benefits. Families that qualify for only P-EBT and do not have an existing EBT card will receive a P-EBT card in the mail (one per family, when possible).

**Q4: Which students/households are eligible for P-EBT?**

**A:** Any household with a student who is eligible for free or reduced-price meals and enrolled in a school that participates in the National School Lunch Program (NSLP) and/or School Breakfast Program (SBP) can receive P-EBT benefits. This population includes:

- Students who attend a school where all students are offered free meals, regardless of income (i.e., CEP schools).
- Students of migrant households. Receiving or using P-EBT benefits does not impact the student's or any household member's immigration status or any current or future application for permanent residency.
- Households that recently lost income due to job loss or fewer hours and are newly eligible for free or reduced-price school meals.

**Q5: Some schools participate in the Community Eligibility Provision (CEP), where all students are eligible for free meals. Are all students attending CEP schools eligible for P-EBT benefits?**

**A:** Yes, all students enrolled in a CEP school will receive P-EBT benefits.

**Q6: Are homeschooled or cyber students eligible for P-EBT benefits?**

**A:** No. A student must be enrolled in a school that participates in the NSLP and/or SBP and meet eligibility requirements for free or reduced-price school meals to receive P-EBT.

**Q7: What is required at the LEA level for a household to receive P-EBT benefits?**

**A:**

- **Encourage Participation:** LEAs should encourage households to apply for free or reduced-price school meals if there is a change in the household income due to loss of job or reduction in pay.
- **Update Contact Information:** LEAs should ensure that contact information for each free and reduced eligible student is current.
- **Review Data:** LEAs should review Direct Certification files in PrimeroEdge as soon as possible, and ensure that all potential high, medium, and sibling matches are reviewed and processed appropriately. However, PDE will extract the information for all directly certified students from PA-SES for all LEAs. PDE will begin to process eligibility for the first wave of benefits based on May 15, 2020 data. Any student not processed as directly certified by that date will not be included in the file for P-EBT benefits. PDE will re-run this list after June 12, 2020, to capture any students directly certified between May 15 and June 12, 2020.
- **Upload Complete Files in PA-SES:** PDE will extract the free and reduced eligible information from PA-SES for students attending LEAs that use the full PA-SES. LEAs that use the full PA-SES do not need to take further action *if* student upload files are complete. In such instances, PDE will only contact the LEA if more information is necessary.
- **Provide Data Files When Necessary:** LEAs that do not use the full PA-SES and use PA-SES only for Direct Certification will be required to provide PDE a file of all free and reduced-eligible students who are *not* directly certified. This file will be due between June 13 and June 18, 2020, in order to capture all students that apply and become

eligible prior to the end of the school year (for P-EBT purposes, that date is June 12, 2020). Details about the file process will be emailed only to LEAs that do not use the full PA-SES. In order to provide eligible families with the P-EBT benefits due to them, LEAs are required to participate in this data collection.

**Q8: How much money will each student receive?**

**A:** Households will receive \$5.70 per child per day of eligibility, up to a maximum of 65 days. Students who were free or reduced-price eligible by March 16, 2020 will receive full benefits (\$370.00). Benefits for students who became eligible after March 16, 2020 will be calculated as follows:

- Students who become eligible between March 17 and March 31, 2020, will receive the benefit for March 16 through June 12 (65 days)
- Students who become eligible between April 1 and April 30 will receive the benefit for April 1 through June 12 (53 days)
- Students who become eligible between May 1 and May 31 will receive the benefit for May 1 through June 12 (31 days)
- Students who become eligible between June 1 and June 12 will receive the benefit for June 1 through June 12 (10 days)

**Q9. Can school food authorities (SFAs) continue to provide meals through the Summer Food Service Program (SFSP) and Seamless Summer Option (SSO) once P-EBT benefits are issued?**

**A:** Yes, SFAs can continue to operate other Federal nutrition programs while participating in P-EBT. The statute does not prohibit children from participating in more than one nutrition program.

**Q10: Will receiving P-EBT benefits affect a family's ability to receive other benefits?**

**A:** No.

**Q11: Will receiving P-EBT benefits affect a student's ability to receive free meals provided by the school?**

**A:** No. P-EBT is in addition to the meals being provided, not in place of those meals.

**Q12: If a family does not want to receive P-EBT benefits, what should they do?**

**A:** Families who do not wish to take advantage of P-EBT should shred their card. This benefit is non-transferrable, so recipients cannot use this benefit to buy food for others. However, they can use the benefits for their own eligible food purchases and, if they are able to, donate their own cash to an organization or a needy family.

**Q13: What if a family does not receive a P-EBT card and feels they should have?**

**A:** LEAs should inform families that benefits are being issued through the end of June. If an LEA receives an inquiry from a family, the LEA should check their records to determine if the



student(s) is/are free or reduced eligible and inform the family of eligibility status. If families believe they are eligible for benefits and have still not received them by the end of June, they should notify the Department of Human Services (DHS) online by visiting:

<https://www.dhs.pa.gov/providers/Providers/Pages/Coronavirus-Pandemic-EBT.aspx>.

**Q14: Do LEAs need to communicate P-EBT information to households?**

**A:** No, LEAs are not required to communicate P-EBT information to households. DHS will be mailing information to P-EBT eligible households.

**Q15: Where can families be directed with questions?**

**A:** Families with questions can be directed to the DHS website:

<https://www.dhs.pa.gov/providers/Providers/Pages/Coronavirus-Pandemic-EBT.aspx>.