



Commonwealth of Massachusetts
Executive Office of Health and Human Services
Department of Transitional Assistance


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Online Guide Transmittal 2020-33A
June 26, 2020

To: Department of Transitional Assistance Staff
From:  Stuart, Associate Commissioner for Change Management
Re: Cross Program: Pandemic EBT Benefits

Overview

In response to the COVID-19 public health crisis, the Governor has closed all schools in Massachusetts for the remainder of the school year. School closures disproportionately impact low-income children who rely on free and reduced-price school meals for adequate nutrition.

The Families First Coronavirus Response Act includes a provision called Pandemic EBT (P-EBT). This is a food benefit for families with school-age children who qualify for free or reduced-price school meals. These food benefits are meant to compensate for the value of school lunch and breakfast for each eligible child.

P-EBT can be used anywhere that SNAP EBT benefits are used. These benefits will be issued to active DTA households as well as households that do not currently receive DTA benefits but include children who receive free or reduced school meals.

Purpose

The purpose of this Transmittal is to advise staff of the processing and issuance of Pandemic EBT (P-EBT) for existing DTA households and Non-DTA households.

**DTA
Households**

A child who is a member of a household actively receiving DTA benefits is automatically certified to receive free school meals. DTA will identify all students in these households that are age five but under nineteen. P-EBT benefits will be issued for students, in these active households, on their existing EBT cards.

Receipt of P-EBT benefits has no impact on a household's monthly SNAP and/or cash benefit amount.

Non-DTA Households

The Department will receive files from each individual school district identifying students in Massachusetts who receive free or reduced-price school meals. This will confer eligibility for P-EBT benefits for those children not receiving DTA benefits. These students will receive benefits individually on a P-EBT card created for each eligible child.

Note: Some school districts are classified as Community Eligibility Provision (CEP) districts. CEP districts provide free meals to all students in the district. All CEP students, regardless of income, are eligible to receive P-EBT benefits.

Non-DTA households receiving P-EBT benefits will not have a case in BEACON. Non-DTA households have been advised to contact DTA Assistance Line for assistance with questions on P-EBT.

Important: Receipt of P-EBT does not impact the participating member's immigration status.

**P-EBT Benefit
Issuance
Groups and
Schedule**

Eligible households will receive P-EBT benefits for the period beginning March 16, 2020 to June 19, 2020 (70 school days). These payments will be classified as a new supplemental issuance type to facilitate easy tracking and reporting on P-EBT benefits. Expungement rules for P-EBT are the same as SNAP; if P-EBT benefits are not used within 365 days, they will be expunged.

All households actively receiving DTA benefits as of April 28, 2020 and confirmed eligible for free/reduced priced meals will receive the full P-EBT benefit amount accounting for the 70 closed school days occurring between March 16, 2020 – June 19, 2020. Two equal payments were issued to this group: the first payment representing the first 35 days of school closure was issued in late April or early May; the second payment representing an additional 35 days of school closure was issued in late May.

Important: P-EBT benefits will go on an active household's EBT card **only** if the case record contains the State Assigned Student Identifier Number (SASID). If the Department does not have knowledge of a child's SASID that child's P-EBT benefit will be issued to the household on a unique P-EBT card. If an active household contacts the Department inquiring about this, please capture all relevant information necessary to complete the Education page, most importantly capturing the child's SASID.

Non-DTA households whose children's P-EBT eligibility was confirmed through school district files were issued their first 35 days of P-EBT benefits in late May. Their second payment of 35 days was issued in late June.

**P-EBT Benefit
Issuance
Groups and
Schedule
(Proration)**

For households that subsequently become eligible for DTA benefits or for free or reduced priced meals after May 10, 2020 P-EBT benefits will be prorated based on their month of application. These households will receive only one P-EBT issuance inclusive of all school days from the 1st day of their application month (for either SNAP or TAFDC) until June 19, 2020.

As mentioned, P-EBT benefits will go on an active household's EBT card **only** if the case record contains a SASID. DTA children without a valid SASID (e.g. private school) will be issued their prorated P-EBT benefits on a unique P-EBT card.

**P-EBT Benefit
Calculation**

P-EBT benefits are calculated using a daily rate of \$5.70 per day, per child multiplied by the number of days school is closed (March 16, 2020 through June 19, 2020; 70 days in total).

Example:

Household of 4, two school aged children:

\$5.70 per child x 2 children = \$11.40 per day x 70 school days =
\$798.00.

Note: Depending on whether the family is being issued the P-EBT benefits as an active DTA household on their regular EBT card, as an active DTA household on unique P-EBT card(s) due to no child SASID(s) present, or as a non-DTA household on the unique P-EBT card will impact how the benefit issuances occur behind the scenes, but not the total amount a family receives. In this example a non-DTA household would receive two individual P-EBT cards, one per child.

**Communication Plan
and Notices**

Both DTA and non-DTA households were sent a notice advising of their eligibility for and receipt of P-EBT benefits. Special instructions for non-DTA households to set up a PIN are included in this notice. Non-DTA households must use the child's DOB and the last four digits of their assigned P-EBT case number, provided on the initial notice, to create a PIN.

Active DTA households also received (or if newly active, will receive) notice of P-EBT benefits through text messaging, Twitter and DTA Connect. A special P-EBT website has been established at <https://www.map-ebt.org/>. The Department has also conducted a public information campaign in multiple languages to alert those eligible of the purpose of P-EBT and how it is to be used.

**P-EBT
Communication and
Client Support**

DTA Households have been advised to contact the DTA Assistance Line for any questions related to P-EBT. If you receive any calls from existing clients asking about P-EBT, you can advise them of their P-EBT issuance date and amount noted in BEACON. If their questions require follow-up, write a detailed narrative in BEACON and ask your SIS or manager to email the Procedural Mailbox.

Due to Project Bread's high call volume, non-DTA households are now also directed to the DTA Assistance Line for questions and assistance related to P-EBT. There are a few possible reasons why a non-DTA client could be calling about their P-EBT benefits. Callers might have received a notice, but not a P-EBT card in the mail and need to request a replacement card. On the other hand, callers might have received a P-EBT card but not a notice, and therefore need their case number or further assistance to PIN their card.

If you receive calls from a non-DTA household about any issues regarding their P-EBT benefits and/or about not having received them, ask the caller for their child's full name, DOB, mailing address (if requesting address change), local student ID or State Assigned Student Identifier (SASID), reachable phone number, and assigned P-EBT case number or P-EBT card number (if they have it). Their P-EBT case number is included on the notice sent by DTA, and case numbers can now easily be obtained by clients and field staff through the DTA Connect Tool.

Since non-DTA households will not have an active BEACON case, send a secure email with the information collected from the caller to the SNAP Outreach Mailbox at:
DTA.SNAPOutreach@MassMail.State.MA.US

The SNAP Outreach team will investigate the case and provide information for you to follow-up with the client. Non-DTA clients are not be referred back to Project Bread FoodSource Hotline for assistance. In order for the DTA Outreach Unit to assist, you must do your best to obtain the P-EBT case number and/or the student's SASID from the caller.

Questions

If you have any policy or procedural questions, after conferring with the appropriate TAO personnel, please have your Systems Information Specialists or TAO management email them to [DTA.Procedural Issues](mailto:DTA.ProceduralIssues).

Systems issues should be directed to the Systems Support Help Desk.
