



# Common Cents

New Hampshire Fiscal Policy Institute Blog

## Pandemic EBT Food Assistance Program Applications Open through August 24

July 21, 2020

The [Pandemic Electronic Benefit Transfer \(P-EBT\) program](#) allows for families with students, who haven't been able to physically attend school, to receive additional nutritional benefits if the student was eligible to receive free or reduced-price school meals. These benefits are equal to the value of the free or reduced-price meals the student would have received if schools weren't closed during the Spring. Depending on the eligibility of the student for free and reduced-price meals, or eligibility of the student's family for the [Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program \(SNAP\)](#) before the COVID-19 crisis began, enrollment in this program may not be automatic. As of July 21, 2020, the New Hampshire Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) estimates potentially 17,000 students in New Hampshire are eligible for P-EBT benefits but have not been automatically enrolled or applied for benefits. The parents or guardians of these students need to apply via [NH Easy](#) by [August 24, 2020](#), after obtaining a verification of eligibility from their school district, in order to receive their P-EBT benefits.

The Families First Coronavirus Response Act, enacted into federal law on March 18, 2020, included provisions permitting the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) and states greater [flexibility](#) in providing additional nutritional benefits to individuals and families. The New Hampshire DHHS applied for several nutritional assistance [waivers](#) to temporarily provide emergency SNAP allotments and postpone redetermination periods, improving both access to and levels of nutritional aid. In May, the P-EBT program waiver was [approved](#) for New Hampshire, allowing for children to receive the values of the free or reduced-price meals they were, or have become, eligible for, so long as schools were physically closed for at least five consecutive days. New Hampshire public schools have been physically [closed](#) from mid-March through the end of the academic year; the P-EBT program provides [\\$5.70](#) for each school day when schools were closed. These additional benefits can be used like traditional SNAP nutritional benefits.

Despite policy actions taken at the state and federal level, the negative effects of the COVID-19 crisis have still [impacted](#) hundreds of thousands of Granite Staters. Nationally,

estimates show that [nearly 14 million children](#) did not have enough food to eat during June, according to U.S. Census Pulse Survey data. In New Hampshire, levels of households reporting [difficulty in acquiring food](#) have been [elevated](#) since the crisis began. The recession caused by the COVID-19 crisis has led to [increased costs](#) for food and additional affordability challenges for many as unemployment has risen to unprecedented levels. Estimates from the U.S. Census Bureau show [nearly half](#) of households in New Hampshire have reported some loss of employment income since mid-March.

Data collected by the [New Hampshire Department of Education](#) show that, at the beginning of the 2019-2020 school year, about 38,624 students, or about 25 percent of those enrolled in public K-12 education, were eligible for free or reduced-price school meals. Most students who were already enrolled in SNAP at the beginning of the 2019-2020 academic year, and were receiving free or reduced-price school meals, will have the value of the P-EBT benefits automatically allocated in addition to their household's SNAP benefits. However, students who may have been income eligible to receive free and reduced-price meals before the pandemic, or whose families have become eligible due to the COVID-19 crisis and recession, will have until August 24, 2020 to apply for their retroactive P-EBT benefits. These P-EBT benefits may help to [combat food insecurity while stimulating the economy](#) during the current recession, as research has shown other nutritional aid programs, like SNAP, has done in the past.

- *Michael Polizzotti, Policy Analyst*