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## **Michigan approved for food assistance for children whose access to free or reduced-cost school meals was affected by COVID-19**

*More than \$38 million in federal dollars will help families put food on the table*

LANSING, Mich. – Michigan children whose access to nutritious school meals has been affected by learning from home due to the COVID-19 pandemic during the current school year will receive assistance benefits that their families can use to pay for food at stores or online.

The Michigan Department of Health and Human Services (MDHHS) is announcing that the state has gained federal approval for a third round of Pandemic-EBT benefits.

About 90,000 children are eligible for Pandemic-EBT benefits this school year because they learned remotely for at least part of the school year.

Students in grades pre-kindergarten through 12 are eligible if they qualify for free or reduced-price lunches at school, attended an in-person school, and in-person learning is or was not available at their school for either a full or partial month. Pandemic-EBT provides another way for students who had in-person classes disrupted due to COVID-19 to access food – along with Michigan Department of Education (MDE) programs that have provided meals to students at mobile and stationary locations.

Each child receives \$7.10 for each day the school is virtual or the student is absent due to COVID.

Benefits are retroactive to September and will be paid through June. Payments will be paid automatically, so families do not need to apply to receive the assistance. Households that already receive food assistance benefits will receive the Pandemic-EBT payments on their Bridge Cards. Families that do not already receive food assistance will receive Pandemic-EBT cards in the mail that they can use to purchase food.

Payments began last week, with benefits being issued for September through December 2021. Benefits will be issued later this month for January and February, in June for March and April, and in July for May and June.

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Pandemic-EBT cards were mailed this week to eligible families who do not already have Bridge Cards. MDHHS is working in partnership with the MDE to collect information from local school districts that the federal government requires for MDHHS to issue the benefits.

During the 2019-20 school year, Michigan was the first state in the nation to gain approval of and distribute Pandemic-EBT benefits.

“I am proud of all that our team at MDHHS has done to provide easy access to food to our families during the pandemic,” said MDHHS Director Elizabeth Hertel. “While we are in the recovery stage of the pandemic, children and families still have great needs due to COVID-19. We are here to address those needs.”

The food assistance benefits will go to Michigan families with students ages 5-18 who are enrolled in the MDE program for students eligible for free or reduced-price school meals.

“This is critical support to families whose children are eligible for free or reduced-price meals,” said State Superintendent Dr. Michael Rice. “The Pandemic-EBT funds are important for struggling families and supplement other meals made possible through hard-working local, state and federal food service staff. It takes a village.”

This spring, Congress chose not to extend the waiver authority of the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) for child nutrition programs. As a result, the USDA will no longer have authority to provide the higher meal reimbursement rates, allow all schools to serve free meals to all students, or extend the broad regulatory flexibility on which these programs have relied for the last two years.

The state is working with U.S. Sen. Debbie Stabenow to try to get Congress to restore those federal meal waivers.

The Michigan Department of Health and Human Services received authorization from the U.S. Department of Agriculture Food and Nutrition Services to provide the additional food assistance.

Prior to receiving their EBT card, families will receive a letter from MDHHS describing how to use the card, how to set up a PIN and other information about food assistance benefits. The cards can be used much like a debit card for food purchased from Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) retailers.

You can find a list of SNAP retailers on the [SNAP Retailers website](#). They also can use their benefits online to purchase food from Meijer, Amazon, Walmart or Aldi.

Information around coronavirus outbreak is changing rapidly. The latest information is available at [Michigan.gov/Coronavirus](https://Michigan.gov/Coronavirus) and [CDC.gov/Coronavirus](https://CDC.gov/Coronavirus).

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