

Frequently-Asked Questions (FAQs) About School Pandemic EBT (P-EBT)

for the 2021-2022 School Year (January 26, 2022)

Q1: What is P-EBT?

A: It is a temporary food benefit approved by the federal government to help households who have been affected by COVID-19-related school closures and school absences.

Q2: Who is eligible for P-EBT benefits?

A: Vermont households with students who would normally receive free or reduced-price meals at school under the National School Lunch Program. Benefits are available for a month if:

- the student had at least one excused COVID-related absence during that month, **and**
 - the student's school has been "qualified" for P-EBT. *See the state plan to learn how a school qualifies for P-EBT: <https://dcf.vermont.gov/esd/covid19/P-EBT>.*
-

Q3: What qualifies as an excused COVID-related absence?

A: A COVID-related absence means an excused absence from school during the month for any of the following reasons:

- COVID-positive or presumed COVID illness,
 - Identified close contact with a COVID-positive individual,
 - COVID symptoms that prompt the need to quarantine and/or test for COVID, or
 - Unplanned classroom, grade or school closure, or transition to remote learning due to a COVID-related reason, including positive cases, staff shortages as a result of COVID, the need to conduct contact tracing, etc.
-

Q4: Our school was closed for a snow day or because of a burst water pipe. Does that qualify students for P-EBT that month?

A: No, only school closures for a COVID-related reason count.

Q5. How do I find out if my household is eligible?

A: Your student's school will determine whether your student is eligible, based on criteria provided by the State of Vermont. The school may contact you to make sure they have the correct information on file. Please respond to their request. If you are eligible, you will get a letter from the Department for Children and Families (DCF) that explains how and when you will receive the benefit.

Q6: I received a P-EBT card last school year (2020-21), but no longer have it. Is that a problem?

A: DCF can send you a replacement card. Instructions will be included in the benefit notice letters going out in April. Please keep your new card if you get one. Additional benefits may be added to it since there will be more than one round of payments this school year.

Q7: When will benefits be issued?

A: The first round of benefits for *September 2021 to January 2022* will be issued in late April 2022. Benefits for *February 2022 to June 2022* will be issued after the end of the school year. Date to be determined. Please continue checking for updated FAQs on the DCF website: <https://dcf.vermont.gov/esd/covid19/P-EBT>.

Q8: How much is the P-EBT benefit?

A: The monthly benefit amount is based on an average absence length of COVID-related absences: \$39.90 each month for September 2021 to January 2022.

Q9: Is the P-EBT benefit the same regardless of how many kids are in the household?

A: The monthly benefit amount is the same for each eligible student. Households will receive different benefits based on the number of months each child in the household was eligible for P-EBT.

Q10: Custody for my student is split between two households. Who gets the benefit?

A: The benefit will be sent to the adult who is listed as “head of household” by the student’s school. This may be the adult who submitted a free and reduced application for the student, or the adult listed as the primary contact in the school’s system. Schools are contacting households in February to confirm who should be listed as “head of household”. Please contact the school if the “head of household” needs to be updated.

Q11: What can I buy with this benefit?

A: See the food items that you may purchase with your P-EBT benefit on the USDA website: <https://www.fns.usda.gov/snap/eligible-food-items>.

Q12: Where can I use my P-EBT card?

A: You can use it to buy eligible food items at any location that accepts 3SquaresVT. This includes grocery stores, supermarkets, convenience stores, and many farmers markets in Vermont. Learn more on DCF’s website at <https://dcf.vermont.gov/benefits/ebt>.

Q13: I don't have children in school. Do I get this benefit?

A: No. This benefit is only for households whose children usually get free or reduced-priced meals at school through the National School Lunch Program and now need to eat those meals at home because of a COVID-related absence or school or classroom closure.

Q14: Is this just for kids in public school?

A: No. Some independent schools participate in the National School Lunch Program, and children at those schools may be eligible for this benefit. However, many independent schools do not participate in the National School Lunch Program, and their students are not eligible.

Q15: What about schools that offer free breakfast and lunch to all students using the Community Eligibility Provision (CEP) or Provision 2?

A: All students in schools that have been qualified for P-EBT will get a P-EBT benefit for months they had a COVID-related absence or there was a COVID-related school or classroom closure.

Q16: Everyone in my child's school normally gets free breakfast through Provision 2. Will everyone get a P-EBT benefit?

A: No. The benefit is only available to students at schools that normally offer both breakfast and lunch for free using Provision 2 or CEP. If your school normally only offers free breakfast using Provision 2, eligibility for P-EBT will be based on each student's eligibility for free and reduced-price lunch.

Q17: Our school is offering free meals to all children this year. Does that mean all students will get the benefit?

A: No. If your student's school does not normally offer "Universal Meals" through CEP or Provision 2 then eligibility will be based on individual student eligibility for free and reduced-price school meals. Schools may offer free meals to all children this year using USDA waivers, but that does not qualify all students at the school for P-EBT.

Q18: My child is being homeschooled this year. Do we qualify for the benefit?

A: No. The P-EBT benefit is available only for students who are enrolled at a school that normally participates in the National School Lunch Program. Students enrolled in home study may still receive meals from open meal sites. Dial 2-1-1 or visit the USDA's Meal Finder webpage to find an open meal site near you: <https://www.fns.usda.gov/meals4kids>.

Q19: When school is closed or my child is absent, we are picking up to-go meals or the school has sent home meals. Do I have to stop doing that if I get a P-EBT benefit? Does that disqualify us from the benefit?

A: No. Students receiving meals for remote learning days are still eligible for the P-EBT benefit. You can still get those meals and qualify for this benefit.

Q20: I have other children not enrolled in school. Are they eligible for the benefit?

A: No. The benefit is only available to children who are enrolled in a school that normally participates in the National School Lunch Program.

Q21: My children did not qualify for free or reduced-price meals before, but our situation has now changed. Can I get P-EBT?

A: If your financial situation has changed, we encourage you to apply for:

- **3SquaresVT** - if you get a monthly benefit, your child qualifies for free meals at school and may receive a P-EBT benefit. Find out how to apply on the DCF website at <https://dcf.vermont.gov/benefits/3SquaresVT>.
- **Free or reduced-price meals** – get the application from your child’s school or on the Agency of Education’s website: <https://education.vermont.gov/>. Approved applications submitted to your school may qualify your household for benefits back to September 2021.

Q22: What if I don’t want this benefit?

A: Participation is voluntary. If you choose not to participate, either:

- Don’t use the extra benefits issued on your 3SquaresVT EBT card. *OR*
- Dispose of your specially issued P-EBT card by cutting through the magnetic strip and discarding the card in a secure manner. You may NOT give your card to someone else.

Q23: Will P-EBT benefits expire if they aren’t spent?

A: Yes. P-EBT benefits expire if the card is not used within 274 days.

Q24: I have more questions. Where can I learn more?

A: Go to <https://dcf.vermont.gov/esd/covid19/P-EBT> or call 1-800-479-6151 for more information. Please contact your student’s school if you have specific concerns about your student’s eligibility for free and reduced meals or would like to change the head of household or mailing address that will be used to issue the card.