

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

for the 2022-2023 School Year (January 4, 2023)

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 (please also see Q3 about universal school meals this school year). Benefits are available for a month if:

- the student had an 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/P-EBT>.*
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Q3: What about universal school meals in Vermont? Does this impact P-EBT eligibility?

A: The Vermont legislature passed a law, Act 151 (2022), that provides state funding for universal school meals in Vermont in all public schools and some independent schools. This means that every public school in Vermont and some independent schools are participating in the National School Lunch Program and operating CEP or Provision 2 in school year 2022-2023. Once each school qualifies (see Q2 above), all students in these schools that miss school for a COVID-related reason will get a P-EBT benefit for the days they missed. At independent schools that participate in the National School Lunch Program and charge households for school meals, students will only get the benefit if they qualify for free or reduced-price meals.

Q4: 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.
 - For more detailed information about COVID-related absences, please see <https://education.vermont.gov/documents/definition-of-covid19-related-absences-for-purposes-of-issuing-pebt-benefits>
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Q5: Our school was closed for a snow day or because of a burst water pipe or broken heating system. Does that qualify students for P-EBT for those missed days?

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

Q6. 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.

Q7: I received a P-EBT card last school year (2021-22), 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 2023. 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.

Q8: When will benefits be issued?

A: The first round of benefits for *September 2022 to January 2023* will be issued in April 2023. Benefits for *February 2023 to June 2023* are planned to be issued in August 2023. Please continue checking for updated FAQs on the DCF website for more specific information: <https://dcf.vermont.gov/esd/P-EBT>. Please note that the federal government will end P-EBT benefits this school year if the federal COVID-19 public health emergency ends during the school year. In that event, these FAQs will be updated to note the final month that P-EBT will be available.

Q9: How much is the P-EBT benefit?

A: The P-EBT benefit is \$8.18 for each day that a student had an excused COVID-related absence.

Q10: Is the P-EBT benefit the same regardless of how many kids are in the household?

A: The monthly benefit amount is individualized for each student based on the number of excused COVID-related absence days they had each month. Households will receive different benefits based on the number of days each month that each child in the household was eligible for P-EBT.

Q11: 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 January to confirm who should be listed as “head of household”. Please contact the school if the “head of household” needs to be updated.

Q12: 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>.

Q13: 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>.

Q14: I don’t have children in school. Do I get this benefit?

A: 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 and also for home study students who meet the requirements listed in Question 16.

Q15: 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.

Q16: My child is being homeschooled this year. Do we qualify for the benefit?

A: You may qualify for the P-EBT benefit this school year based on new guidance from the federal government. The following home study students may be eligible for a P-EBT benefit this year:

- the student is enrolled through the Agency of Education in home study in school year 2022-2023
- the student enrolled in home study sometime after January 27, 2020 (students enrolled in home study prior to January 27, 2020 are not eligible)
- if the student has not previously attended a Vermont school in person, either because they are new to Vermont since January 2020 or the child is in either kindergarten, first or second grade this school year, the parent/guardian completes an attestation that states that their child is being homeschooled this school year due to concerns about COVID.

Q17: Do families enrolled in home study through the Agency of Education need to apply for P-EBT benefits to receive them this school year?

A: No. AOE and DCF will be using home study enrollment information on file to issue the home study P-EBT benefits. Because all public schools in Vermont are offering free meals through Provision 2 and CEP, all home study students who meet the requirements listed in Question 16 will be able to receive the benefit without having to demonstrate that they are eligible for free and reduced-price school meals. AOE will be in contact with home study families if there are any questions about the enrollment or contact information on file with AOE and also to complete attestations for those families who need to complete them to confirm that their child is being homeschooled this year due to concerns about COVID.

Q18: How much is the home study P-EBT benefit?

A: The home study benefit is \$143.15 per month for each month September through June that the student is enrolled in home study through AOE. Please note that the federal government will end P-EBT benefits this school year if the federal COVID-19 public health emergency ends during the school year. In that event, these FAQs will be updated to note the final month that P-EBT will be available.

Q19: When will the home study P-EBT benefit be issued?

A: The home study benefit will be issued in one lump sum in May 2023 and will include September through June benefits, unless the federal public health emergency ends before June. In that event, these FAQs will be updated to note the final month that P-EBT will be available for this school year.

Q20: 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.

Q21: I have other children not enrolled in school or home study. 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 or eligible students enrolled in home study through AOE that meet the criteria in Question 16.

Q22: My children attend an independent school that participates in the National School Lunch Program. 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 2022.
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Q23: 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.
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Q24: 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.

Q25: I have more questions. Where can I learn more?

A: Go to <https://dcf.vermont.gov/esd/P-EBT> or call 1-800-479-6151, option 7, 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.