



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Arizona To Provide \$116.4 Million In Pandemic School Meal Replacement Benefits To Children

PHOENIX – (May 15, 2020) The Arizona Department of Economic Security (DES) announced today \$116.4 million in Arizona P-EBT Pandemic School Meal Replacement Benefits will be distributed to approximately 370,000 children who are eligible for free or reduced-price school meals. This is in addition to the \$65 million distributed over the past few weeks to approximately 206,000 eligible students who were already receiving Nutrition Assistance benefits.

“Arizona is working to ensure kids and families have access to healthy, nutritious meals,” said Governor Doug Ducey. “This funding builds on our efforts to provide additional relief to those in need. My thanks to the USDA Food and Nutrition Service, Arizona Department of Economic Security and everyone working to support others during COVID-19.”

Distribution of benefits to families began on Tuesday, May 12, and will continue over a thirteen-day distribution period, organized by last name. DES started mailing Electronic Benefits Transfer (EBT) cards Wednesday, May 13. Eligible families that do not receive a P-EBT card, but have children participating in the free or reduced-price school lunch program, will be able to verify their status through an online portal launching later this month.

“We want to maintain access to nutritious meals for Arizona’s children during these temporary school closures,” said Tom Betlach, from the Office of the Director. “This second phase of benefits will provide families with additional access to healthy food for their children.”

The USDA Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) authorized DES to provide Pandemic EBT following the passage of the Families First Coronavirus Response Act. The benefits will be retroactive to March 16, 2020, and are calculated based on the number of school days for which the child would have received assistance from school meal programs. Eligible families will receive \$69 for March, \$126 for April, and \$120 for May, for each child. Families that have been accessing meals from schools during the closure are still eligible for these benefits.

Additionally, Governor Ducey and DES have submitted several requests to FNS to streamline and enhance access for families. To date, the federal agency has authorized the following changes:

- Allowing SNAP participants to make online purchases for grocery items with authorized SNAP retailers;
- Increasing SNAP benefits to the maximum allotment for two months due to pandemic-related economic conditions;
- Waiving interview requirements when determining eligibility, unless more information is needed from the applicant;
- Temporarily suspending work requirements for able-bodied adults without dependents participating in SNAP;
- Extending certification periods by 6 months for recipients due to renew benefits in March, April, May and June; and
- Allowing for verbal attestation in place of a signature on SNAP applications when necessary.

DES will continue to work with its federal partners to provide greater assistance to Arizona families in need. To apply for Nutrition Assistance, visit healtharizonaplus.gov or call 1-855-432-7587, 7am-6pm Monday through Friday.

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