



# Montana Needs Pandemic EBT (P-EBT)

## What is Pandemic EBT (P-EBT)?

P-EBT was established under the Trump Administration in March of 2020 to provide nutritional resources to families who lost access to free or reduced-price school meals due to school or childcare closures, virtual instruction, or students quarantining.

Families receive grocery money on a new or existing EBT (Electronic Benefits Transfer) card to help fill the school meals and child care meals gap. To distribute each round of P-EBT that becomes available, the state must submit a plan to the US Department of Agriculture (USDA) for approval.

## What impact has P-EBT had in Montana and beyond?

Montana has taken advantage of every P-EBT iteration since March of 2020. Montana provided a total of \$67 million in benefits to eligible children over the Spring of 2020, School Year 2020-2021, and Summer of 2021.

Not only have these benefits helped families afford the rising cost of food, they are stimulating local economies and food systems. P-EBT benefits can be spent at more than 750 SNAP retailers across Montana, including many farmers markets.

Additionally, according to a study by the Brookings Institute, nationwide, P-EBT reduced food insufficiency among SNAP households by 28 percent.

## Why is P-EBT for the 2021-2022 School Year Necessary?

Most schools are currently operating in-person, which brings up the question, why is submitting a School Year 21-22 P-EBT plan necessary? This year, USDA has added flexibility for states to provide benefits to children who are quarantining and therefore are absent from school due to COVID-19. This allows states to provide necessary benefits to children who may be missing school due to various COVID related reasons. Additionally, P-EBT helps schools remain open because families are able to keep sick kids home without having to worry about losing access to school meals.

And, there is an even more vital reason for submitting a school year plan. If Montana has a school year plan, the state is also able to provide Summer 2022 benefits. Summer benefits will reach an even wider group of children—all children in Montana who qualify for Free or Reduced-Price school meals.

If Montana does not submit the school year plan, as current guidance stands, the state will not be able to participate in the Summer P-EBT program for summer 2022.

## Why Summer P-EBT?

No child should face hunger over the summer. The pandemic has only exacerbated the difficulties that struggling families face every summer when they lose access to school meals and are more at-risk for hunger. Providing Summer EBT benefits has been piloted in other states for more than 10 years, and the USDA during the Trump Administration stated that the pilots “have shown that providing a benefit...during the summer to low-income households with school-aged children can reduce severe food insecurity among children.”

In rural states like Montana, access to summer meal sites is a huge barrier to participation. Providing summer EBT benefits along with traditional summer meal sites ensures all students can access adequate nutrition while they are not in school. These programs work in a complimentary fashion and allow for improved nutrition all summer long.