

COVID-19 DHS Response: SNAP Policies

The Arkansas Department of Human Services (DHS) is committed to protecting the health and safety of Arkansans while continuing to provide critical services to those in need during the COVID-19 (coronavirus) public health emergency. Changes to the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) are required to ensure applications can be processed and benefits can continue or be granted for eligible Arkansans.

Telephone Applications and Waiver of Signature Requirement

- DHS is now conducting SNAP interviews by phone rather than in person as was required.
- SNAP Policy 8120 states that SNAP applications must be signed, including those that are submitted electronically. This policy did not allow for applications that are taken over the phone to be processed with an alternative signature.
- DHS requested and received approval from the USDA to suspend this policy through May 31st to allow no signature. USDA also has waived the requirement for an eligibility interview. DHS is updating its processes to start these new procedures.
- DHS still is required to verify identity and other eligibility factors.
- This policy change will introduce no additional costs for the state.

Automatic Good Cause for SNAP Clients Not Cooperating with Office of Child Support Enforcement

- Effective March 27, 2020, all SNAP clients will be given a “good cause” exemption that allows them to keep their SNAP benefits, even if they do not cooperate with the Office of Child Support Enforcement by not providing them with information they have requested or missed appointments that were scheduled. Good cause will be allowed through May 31st.

Nationwide Suspension of SNAP Work Requirement for Able-bodied Adults without Dependents

- With the passage of the Families First Coronavirus Act, the federal government suspended the rule requiring all able-bodied adult SNAP beneficiaries without dependents who are required to report work or other activities to maintain their SNAP benefits.
- The suspension will continue through the public health emergency.
- This policy change will introduce no additional costs for the state.

Expedited SNAP Benefits Processing After Loss of Income Due to COVID-19

- DHS is expediting SNAP eligibility for individuals who have a loss of income due to the public health emergency.

Fact Sheet

- In expedited application processing the individual will “attest” to losing income due to the public health emergency. If they attest to that, then they may be certified under expedited provisions and verification requirements are postponed.
- A screening question is being added to the expedited screener for staff regarding loss of income due to Coronavirus. DHS has instructed the work force to presume that clients who attest to losing some or all their income temporarily are expedited automatically and eligible to be processed immediately.

Emergency Supplemental SNAP Benefits

- In compliance with the federal Families First Coronavirus Response Act, DHS is distributing emergency supplemental food assistance to current SNAP households up to the maximum amount allowed for each household size.
- The supplemental benefit for March was automatically loaded to SNAP clients’ Electronic Benefits Transfer (EBT) cards on March 30. Any Arkansas households that are approved for SNAP through the end of March will also get the supplemental benefit for this month.
- If a SNAP household was already receiving the maximum amount of benefits for its household size, that household will not get a supplemental payment.
- Clients will get April SNAP benefits on the regular schedule. However, supplemental benefits for April will be loaded to EBT cards based on the last digit of the Social Security number (SSN) of the person listed on the SNAP case for the household. That schedule is below:
 - April 15th – SSN 0-3
 - April 20th – SSN 4-6
 - April 25th – SSN 7-9

Pandemic SNAP Benefits for Children Eligible for Free or Reduced Lunches

- USDA is allowing states to opt-in to the Pandemic SNAP program, which would provide SNAP benefits for families of children who received free or reduced lunches at their schools. A benefit amount equivalent to the value of meals that are normally served at school will be issued through electronic benefit transfer (EBT) process.
- These benefits will be made available to children whose families are participating in the SNAP program as well as those who are not. The effort to implement this benefit is a joint project between the Arkansas Department of Human Services and the Arkansas Department of Education.
- Staff at both departments are working to collect the data needed to draft this waiver request.