

Food Benefits for 25,000 Students Being Mailed to Delaware Families through DHSS' Summer EBT Program

NEW CASTLE (June 29, 2017) – Electronic benefit cards with access to food benefits are arriving for 25,000 students through the Department of Health and Social Services' Summer EBT Program. The program offers a way to support families in ensuring that their children have dependable access to food during the summer months.

The Summer EBT Program helps families buy healthy food during the summer for children who currently receive free or reduced-price meals at school. The food benefits are loaded on an electronic benefit transfer (EBT) card for use during summer months when free or reduced-price meals through the school are not available. This is the fifth year that Delaware has been awarded a federal grant through the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) to operate the program. This year's grant is for \$2.25 million.

Collaborating with the Delaware Department of Education, this initiative involves students in school districts from across the state in pre-kindergarten through 12th grade. In 2012, the first year of the summer program, about 4,000 students in the Red Clay, Colonial, Christina and Appoquinimink school districts were served. The program has expanded each year since then.

Letters to parents, notifying them of their children's eligibility for the program, already have been sent. To be eligible, families must have participated in the Summer EBT Program in 2015 or 2016.

“The Summer EBT Program provides another way to make sure that eligible students get enough to eat during the summer months,” said Gov. John Carney, whose wife, First Lady Tracey Quillen Carney, is leading a Delaware team studying how Virginia has leveraged public-private partnerships to ensure school-age children have regular access to healthy meals. “It’s critical that young people have access to quality food year-round, so they remain healthy and ready to learn when school begins again in the fall.”

In 2016 in Delaware, more than 98,000 children received free or reduced-price lunch, including tens of thousands who relied on school nutrition programs as their primary source of healthy meals. About 14.8 percent of Delaware’s children are classified as food insecure, which means they don’t always know where they will find their next meal. These problems are intensified when schools let out for the summer.

Families who are chosen for the project receive up \$30 per month for each school-age child in the home. Electronic benefit transfer cards are being mailed to parents through the first week in July. No matter when parents receive the cards, they will receive benefits for June, July and August. The cards are valid through Aug. 28. Users can buy non-cooked foods from merchants who accept food benefits. The cards cannot be used at fast-food stores or restaurants.

“As a family physician, I have seen what hunger does to children physically, emotionally and mentally,” said DHSS Secretary Dr. Kara Odom Walker. “The Summer EBT Program is an effective way to make sure that children get the access to food during the summer months that they need. We’re proud to join with the Department of Education in providing this much-needed support to families across our state.”

“USDA helps Delaware families afford fresh food throughout the year, and this program helps bridge the gap between the school year when children receive nutritious school meals and summer

breaks when meals may be harder to come by,” Sen. Tom Carper said. “This important federal investment goes a long way to help our children learn and thrive – not only in the classroom, but throughout their everyday lives. I encourage anyone who knows a child or family in need to tell them about this important program so that we can decrease the number of young men and women who aren’t sure they’ll always be able to find a healthy meal this summer.”

“I thank the Delaware Department of Health and Social Services and Delaware Department of Education and the support of the USDA for their continued work to ensure that all children across our state are able to live a happy and healthy life,” Sen. Chris Coons said. “Access to good nutrition is a critical part of a child’s educational and physical development, and I am pleased the Summer EBT Program has continued and will help children receive the nutrients they need during the summer months.”

“The unfortunate truth is that too many of our children are unsure where their next meal is going to come from, and that is an issue that is further exacerbated during the summer months,” U.S. Rep. Lisa Blunt Rochester said. “It’s critical we continue to support this program and ensure that families and children alike have the opportunity to purchase nutritious foods that prepare them to succeed, and I thank the state for their work and attention on this issue.”

In addition to Delaware, USDA awarded Summer EBT grants for summer 2017 to eight other states and tribal nations that operated demonstration projects in 2016: Connecticut, Michigan, Missouri, Nevada, Oregon, Virginia, and the Chickasaw and Cherokee nations. USDA also awarded Summer EBT grants to two new applicants, Tennessee and Texas, which will operate demonstration projects in summer 2018. They are the first states to launch new Summer EBT demonstration projects

since 2012, allowing USDA and the states to test strategies for building Summer EBT infrastructure and engaging local communities.

USDA studies have found that insufficient nutrition may hinder the ability of children to function normally. Potential problems include: increased risk for chronic health conditions such as anemia and asthma; increased risk for being hospitalized; more frequent instances of oral health problems; poorer physical quality of life, which may prevent them from fully engaging in daily activities; greater risk of truancy and school tardiness during the school year; or such behavior problems as fighting, hyperactivity, aggression, anxiety, mood swings, and bullying.

For more information about Delaware's Summer EBT Program for Children, contact Ruth Campbell with DHSS' Division of Social Services at 302-424-7287.

Delaware Health and Social Services is committed to improving the quality of the lives of Delaware's citizens by promoting health and well-being, fostering self-sufficiency, and protecting vulnerable populations.