



COVID-19 Resource Guide

SNAP | FOOD SECURITY



The economic meltdown resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic has created an extraordinary demand for food assistance. State agencies are working overtime to figure out how to get food to hungry Alabamians while schools are closed, people are sheltering in place and the risk of infection is high. Applications for food assistance through the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) are at record highs as unemployment soars.

[Start your application for Alabama food assistance here](#) | or call **334.242.1700** for assistance | [Find a local food bank here](#)

[The Families First Coronavirus Response Act](#) – the second federal law in response to the pandemic – gave the Alabama Department of Human Resources (DHR) new assistance, authority and flexibility to expand SNAP assistance during this pandemic. Thanks to the new legislation, [DHR can make temporary but important changes to SNAP](#). These changes include:

Suspension of Time Limits

The Families First Act includes a nationwide, temporary suspension of [SNAP's three-month assistance time limit](#) for able-bodied adults under age 50 and without children in their SNAP household. Officials reinstated this time limit in 2016 after the Great Recession ended. Since then, tens of thousands of Alabama SNAP participants have been cut off the program. People who lost food assistance because of the time limit are now eligible again under the new federal law. But it is unclear how officials will notify them of their restored eligibility.

Increased Assistance for Most Families

The Families First Act authorizes states to give people additional SNAP benefits up to the maximum amount allowed for their household size. This will be an enormous help for hundreds of thousands of struggling Alabamians. Unfortunately, the poorest families – those already receiving the maximum benefit – will not receive an increase.

The increased benefits for March [were added to participants' EBT cards](#) around the end of March. And participants will see this month's increased benefits added to EBT cards around the end of April. DHR will approve new SNAP participants for assistance at the maximum level for their household size.

Replace School Meals with SNAP and SNAP-like Assistance

The Families First Act allows states to provide school meal replacement assistance of around \$114 per child per month. This aid can come through SNAP or another mechanism if the children attend a school that is closed and otherwise would receive free or reduced-price school meals. This would include all children who are certified as eligible for free breakfast and lunch. It also would include all children who attend a school that provides free meals to all enrolled students through the [Community Eligibility Provision](#).

Since all public schools in Alabama are closed for the rest of the semester, households already receiving SNAP could simply see their SNAP assistance increased by the value of school meals that children in the family previously received. However, Alabama hasn't yet decided how to give SNAP-like "issuances" to such families who are not already enrolled in SNAP. Participants cannot receive school meal replacement benefits until DHR and the state Department of Education agree on a plan and get approval from the USDA Food and Nutrition Service (FNS).

Reduced Administrative Burdens

The Families First Act allows states to request policy changes to streamline SNAP procedures to keep up with increased demand. For example, a state could ask to make certification periods longer or waive interviews with new participants. States also could seek to reduce the amount of information that must be verified and simplify the verification process. Alabama already has streamlined many procedures, but it should make additional SNAP administrative changes to reduce waiting time for approvals. Thus far, DHR has not requested any administrative waivers from FNS.

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