



Pandemic Electronic Benefits Transfer (P-EBT) Questions and Answers for Retailers

Main Takeaway: On November 4, 2020, the Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) published the [Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program: Pandemic Electronic Benefits Transfer \(P-EBT\) Integrity Final Rule](#), which is codified at 7 CFR 284.1. This rule requires FNS to treat P-EBT benefits the same as SNAP benefits for the purposes of identifying and sanctioning Program violators.

1. What is Pandemic Electronic Benefits Transfer (P-EBT)?

P-EBT is part of the U.S. government response to the COVID-19 pandemic, and was established by the Families First Coronavirus Response Act (FFCRA). P-EBT provides benefits – very similar to SNAP benefits -- to children that would have received free or reduced price school meals, if not for COVID-related school closures and/or COVID-related reductions in school hours or attendance.

For most households, P-EBT benefits were loaded onto SNAP cards, so retailers will not notice any difference between P-EBT and SNAP benefits. For some households, P-EBT benefits were loaded onto new cards that do not look like SNAP cards, but work the same.

Retailers must treat P-EBT benefits and households the same as SNAP benefits and households.

2. How can P-EBT benefits be used?

P-EBT households can use their benefits at SNAP-authorized retailers, to purchase eligible foods (i.e., the same foods that can be purchased with SNAP benefits).

3. What are prohibited activities (i.e., program violations) in P-EBT? What are the penalties for these violations?

Per Section 284.1 of the SNAP regulations, P-EBT violations, and penalties for committing such violations, are the same as SNAP violations and penalties. You can review the SNAP retailer training materials here: <https://www.fns.usda.gov/snap/retailer/training>. Briefly, P-EBT violations include, but are not limited to:

Trafficking: Buying or selling P-EBT benefits for cash. The penalties for trafficking include permanent disqualification, forfeiture of property, and/or a monetary penalty for each violation.

Selling ineligible items: Selling cigarettes, tobacco, alcohol, or expensive nonfood items for P-EBT benefits may result in a 3- to 5-year disqualification or equivalent civil money penalty.

Selling common ineligible items like detergent or paper products for P-EBT benefits may result in a 6-month to 3-year disqualification or equivalent civil money penalty.