

A Guide to Summer EBT Eligibility

There are two pathways for children to be deemed eligible to receive benefits through the Summer EBT Program, which is set to begin in summer 2024. The first is through automatic issuance, and the second is via a Summer EBT application. This resource outlines these pathways as well as frequently asked questions.

Pathway One: Automatic Issuance

Most children eligible to receive Summer EBT benefits will receive them automatically, without filling out a Summer EBT application. The eligibility information coming from schools and other sources to provide benefits automatically is known as streamlined certification. This is the pathway for the following children:

- children who have been certified as eligible for free or reduced-price meals. This includes students who are certified through a school meals application and those who are automatically certified because they are categorically eligible;
- children who attend a special provision school (Community Eligibility Provision, Provision 2 or 3) **and are certified** as eligible for free or reduced-price school meals. This includes students who are categorically eligible and are certified without an application, those who filled out a school meals application for a Provision 2 or 3 base year, those who filled out an “alternative form¹” that documents their household income meets the eligibility requirements for free or reduced-price school meals;² and
- school-age children (children who [fall within their state’s compulsory education age range](#)) who are not enrolled in a school participating in the National School Lunch Program (NSLP) or the School Breakfast Program, including those being homeschooled or attending virtual schools **and can be directly certified** (see Question 1 below for more information on direct certification).

Categorical Eligibility and Direct Certification

Children in households participating in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), Temporary Assistance for Needy Families, and the Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations, as well as children who are homeless, migrant, or in foster care are “categorically eligible” (automatically eligible) for free school meals and can be certified without submitting a school meal application.³

States and school districts are required to “directly certify” children in households participating in SNAP for free school meals through data matching SNAP records with school enrollment lists. States and school districts have the option of directly certifying other categorically eligible children as well. Thirty-nine states also use income information from Medicaid to directly certify students as eligible for free or free and reduced-price school meals.

¹ Alternative income forms are used by some special provision schools to document a child’s household income as meeting the income eligibility requirements for free or reduced-price school meals for purposes outside of qualifying children for free or reduced-price school meals, such as for state education funding.

² The use of an alternative income form for Summer EBT for proof of eligibility is a flexibility for states that will only be offered in Summer 2024.

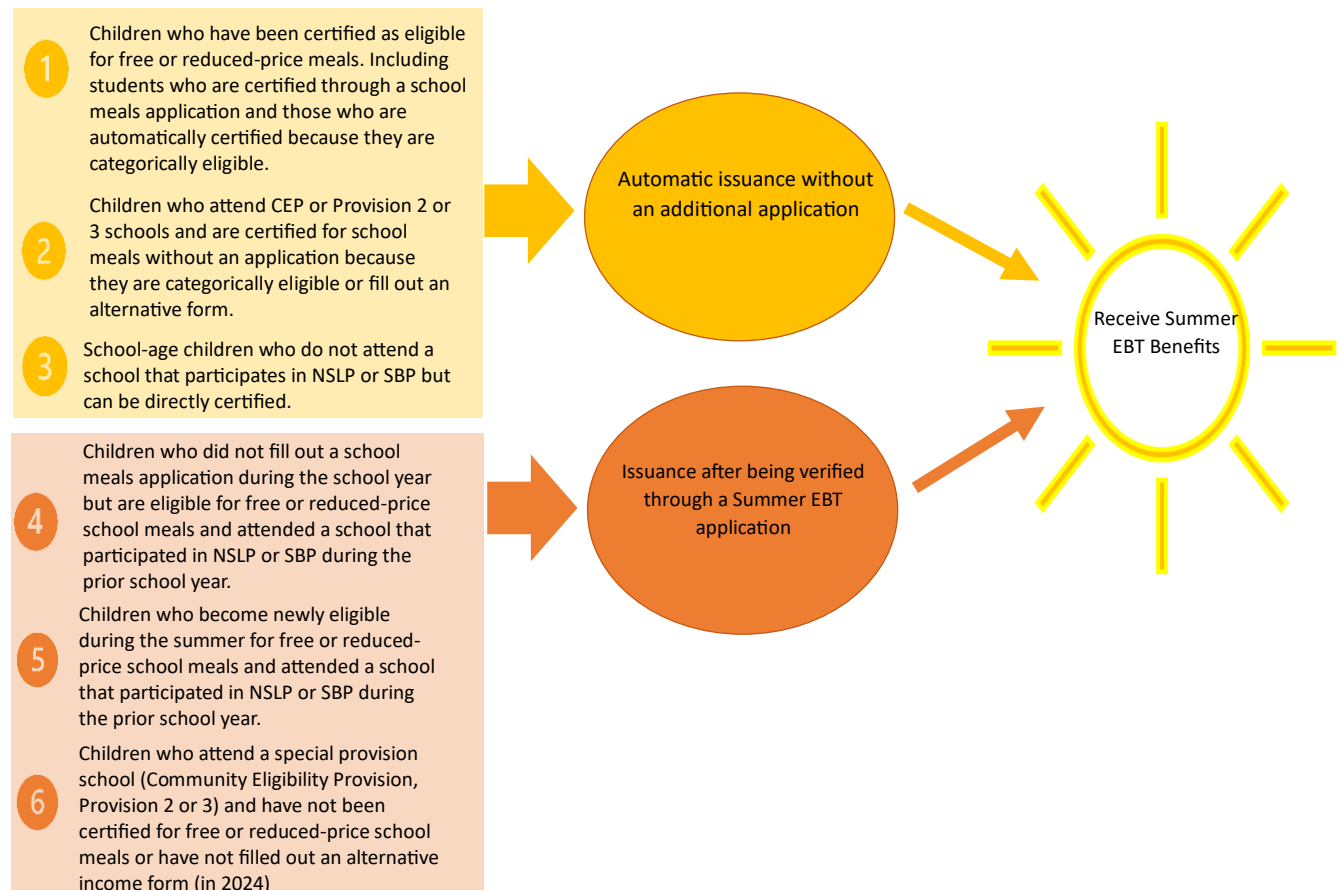
³ Children who participate in Head Start are categorically eligible but most likely do not fall within the definition of school-age. Children in head-start who receive meals through the NSLP are eligible to receive Summer EBT.

Pathway Two: An Application

Eligible children who do not qualify for automatic issuance are still able to receive benefits through an application. States are required to set up a statewide Summer EBT application beginning in 2025 but are encouraged to develop one for 2024. A school meal application can be used to qualify students for Summer EBT, and filling one out after June 30 will allow the child to be certified for free or reduced-price school meals in the upcoming school year in addition to receiving Summer EBT benefits³. Children who will need to fill out an application to receive Summer EBT benefits include:

- children who did not fill out a school meals application during the school year but are eligible for free or reduced-price school meals and attended a school that participated in NSLP or SBP during the prior school year;
- children who become newly eligible during the summer for free or reduced-price school meals and attended a school that participated in NSLP or SBP during the prior school year; and
- children who attend a special provision school (Community Eligibility Provision, Provision 2 or 3) **and have not been certified** for free or reduced-price school meals or have not filled out an alternative income form (in 2024).

Summer EBT Benefits Pathways



³ To see income eligibility requirements for school meals, you can check out FRAC's table: [Income Guidelines for the Child Nutrition Programs](#).

Who Is Not Eligible for Summer EBT Benefits?

If a child does not fit the criteria for automatic issuance or to fill out an application, they may be ineligible for Summer EBT benefits. There are two groups of children who will not be able to receive benefits:

- children who attend schools that participate in the National School Lunch Program, but are not income eligible for free or reduced-price school meals; and
- children who cannot be directly certified **and do not attend** a school participating in the National School Lunch Program.

Frequently Asked Questions

1. How do you know if a school age child can be directly certified?

If a household participates in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, states are required to conduct direct certification. Most states also directly certify school age children whose households participate in Temporary Assistance for Needy Families, Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations, and (in some states) Medicaid. Some states even conduct direct certification for other categorically eligible children, such as children in foster care.

Children who can be directly certified and are not enrolled in a school, a Head Start, or a pre-K program that participates in the National School Lunch Program must meet the definition of school age to receive benefits. The definition of school age varies from state to state and is limited to children who are “required to attend school.” Click [here](#) for a list of the ages considered school age.

2. A child attends a community eligibility or other special provision school but cannot be directly certified. Throughout the Pandemic EBT Program, they received benefits automatically. Do they need to fill out an application for this program?

Yes, students that attend a special provision school but cannot be directly certified must fill out an application to determine if they are eligible based on their household income. This is one key difference between the past Pandemic EBT Program and the current Summer EBT Program.

3. A child does not attend a school that participates in the National School Lunch Program. Is there any way for that child to receive Summer EBT benefits?

Families can apply for SNAP benefits, and if a household qualifies to receive SNAP benefits, then they will also receive Summer EBT benefits for their school-age children.