

# Department of Human Services Warns Pennsylvanians of Potential Scam Involving Pandemic EBT Benefits

By Scott Major

Harrisburg, PA – The Department of Human Services (DHS) is warning of a possible scam concerning Pandemic EBT (P-EBT) benefits and reminding Pennsylvanians to be skeptical of unsolicited or random calls or text messages about public-assistance programs – especially when the calls or text messages solicit personal information, such as Social Security numbers.

“We are all living through difficult times, and unfortunately, there are people who will try to take advantage of others who may need help meeting essential needs. Be mindful, stay aware, and if you think something looks off, it probably is,” DHS Secretary Teresa Miller said.

DHS is investigating a report of individuals receiving calls with pre-recorded messages advising them to expedite their P-EBT benefits issuance by providing their Social Security number and case record number. In the message, the speaker claims to be from a County Assistance Office (CAO).

DHS and other government agencies do not ask for information about P-EBT, SNAP or any other public-assistance programs via unsolicited or random calls or texts, and Pennsylvanians should not reply to such a call or text or share any personal information if they are contacted in this way. If you or anyone you work with receive unsolicited or random calls or text messages telling you that you qualify for assistance and then asking for personal information, it is most likely a scam. Do not respond. Delete the message so you do not get caught in an identity theft scam.

Pennsylvanians who have questions about whether a call, text, letter, or other communication is legitimate should contact DHS’ Office of Income Maintenance. Clients in Philadelphia should call the Philadelphia Customer Service Center at 215-560-7226. Clients in all other counties can call the Statewide Customer Service Center at 1-877-395-8930.

The federal government authorized P-EBT in the spring to allow states to assist families with school-age children who qualified for free-and-reduced price meals through the National School Lunch Program – and who lost their easy access to breakfast and lunch at school as a result of the school closures related to COVID-19

earlier this year.

DHS began distributing P-EBT benefits to Pennsylvania families in late May. To date, more than \$360 million has been distributed to about 680,000 households to help families feed nearly 1 million children. Families received about \$370 per child.

DHS administered this program in collaboration with the Pennsylvania Department of Education and schools across the commonwealth. The program was recently reauthorized by the federal government for the 2020-2021 school year. Pennsylvania and other states are currently awaiting guidance from the United States Department of Agriculture to begin the program for the current school year.

Additional information about Pennsylvania’s P-EBT can be found here.

If Pennsylvanians need help purchasing or affording food for themselves and their families, help may also be available through the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). SNAP helps nearly 1.9 million Pennsylvanians by providing assistance each month for groceries, helping households purchase enough food to avoid going hungry. SNAP is our country’s most important and most impactful anti-hunger program. For every meal provided by a Feeding

Pennsylvania food bank, SNAP provides nine. While SNAP is intended to be a supplemental program, during a pandemic and historic unemployment, resources are strained, particularly for our lowest income Pennsylvanians.

Applications for the SNAP and other public assistance programs can be submitted online at [www.compass.state.pa.us](http://www.compass.state.pa.us). All Pennsylvanians experiencing financial hardships due to the pandemic, a lost job, or a change in income are strongly encouraged to apply and see if they qualify for assistance with food, health care, and other essential needs.

For more information about food assistance resources for people around Pennsylvania impacted by COVID-19 and the accompanying economic insecurity, visit the Department of Agriculture’s food security guide.



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## What You Know May Save Your Life

Last week I explained a little bit about carbon monoxide (called CO) but not about how it makes you feel or how it can end your life. The most dangerous and scary part about CO is that it is colorless and odorless. If you smell the exhaust from a car, you are smelling hydrocarbons from the burned fuel. That should be a tipoff that there is CO too but you don't smell the CO. The hydrocarbons won't kill you but the CO will. When gas furnaces fail there is no odor at all, just a buildup of CO and the symptoms start out as nausea and/or headaches. Flu symptoms best describes it at the start. How it progresses from that point depends on the concentration of CO in the air. A lethargic feeling is next, and maybe feeling fatigued and wanting to sleep. If the concentration gets high enough, that will be a long sleep. If you leave the house, you will feel better in a few hours. Survivors are people who go to work every day and feel ok by the time they come home and then the next morning are not feeling well again. People who stay home don't get better. If the concentration is low enough they just keep feeling sick and waiting for it to go away. Especially now during the COVID pandemic, people are in their homes more than ever and if a problem arises, it may go undetected for several days.

A CO detector with alarm is very important to have even if you don't have a gas appliance in your home. Homes with attached garages can also create CO sickness depending on how long a car runs in the garage and how quickly the garage door is closed after the car leaves or enters.

A low level CO detector will let you know when it senses 25 parts per million (ppm) of CO in the air for 10 minutes. A standard CO detector won't alarm until the level exceeds 70 ppm for 4 hours. That is too high and too long in my opinion but it was designed to not cause a lot of nuisance calls for first responders. If a CO alarm goes off in your home, the best thing you can do is open doors and windows to ventilate and turn off gas appliances. It is also recommended to leave the house immediately until you have the source of the problem located and repaired.

**Ken Field is the owner of Slate Belt Energy and Field's Service, Inc. As a certified energy rater and contractor, he is qualified to assess every aspect of energy usage and prescribe solutions to save energy. He can be reached at 610-759-6306 or email Ken@FieldsService.com**

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