

# **William E. Morris Institute for Justice**

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## **If you lost your job, were furloughed or your earnings were reduced, and you need help buying food for your family, you may be eligible for SNAP!**

The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (“SNAP”) (also known as Nutrition Assistance (“NA”) or “food stamps” in Arizona), gives individuals and families money to buy food at grocery stores, convenience stores and at some farmers markets. SNAP is run by the Arizona Department of Economic Security (“DES”). If you were laid off, furloughed, or have reduced hours and need help putting food on the table, you can apply for SNAP benefits.

We prepared this handout to explain the food stamp program. This is general information and does not discuss all situations. We will update this handout as more information is available during the COVID-19 crisis.

**You have the right to apply for food stamps any time.**

**In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, there have been changes to food stamps.**

Some of those changes are:

- During the pandemic, there are no work requirements for adults.
- During the pandemic, students are not required to work or look for work.
- During April and May all households will get the maximum amount of food stamps for their household size.

Also, because the President gave Arizona a **Major Disaster Declaration**, more persons will be eligible for food stamps. More information to follow.

## **Who is eligible for food stamp benefits?**

Most households with low or no income are eligible for food stamps. Here are some general rules:

- DES will only look at your income during the month you apply for benefits.
- DES will only consider income that is reasonably expected to continue.
- In general, if your income is below 185% of the Federal Poverty Level, you may be eligible for food stamps. As an example, for a family of 3, 185% of the federal poverty level is \$3,289 per month.
- If you live with your spouse and/or any children under the age 22, they are considered part of your “food stamp household,” and you must apply as one household.
- If you live with other persons or your children are older than age 22, you do not need to apply for food stamps with them unless you buy and prepare your food together. You can apply for food stamps as different households if you buy and prepare your food separately.

### **When should I apply for food stamps?**

You can apply for food stamps at any time. You do not have to wait.

### **What if I applied for food stamps in the past and was denied?**

You should apply again. You may be eligible for food stamps now even though you were not eligible in the past. DES will look at your current situation to determine if you are eligible for food stamps at this time.

### **How much can I get in food stamps?**

Under the current changes due to the pandemic, everyone who is eligible for food stamps will get the *maximum monthly food stamp benefits* for their household size in April and May 2020. As an example, the maximum monthly food stamp benefit is \$509 for a family of 3.

### **Is there a way to get food stamps quickly?**

If you have very limited money or no money you can ask for emergency or “expedited” food stamps. DES must make a decision on your application and give you your benefits within 7 days. You can get emergency food stamps if you meet **one** of the following situations:

- Your income in the month you apply and your cash on hand and in the bank is expected to be less than your rent **or** mortgage **and** your utility expenses.

- Your income in the month you apply is expected to be less than \$150 and you have less than \$100 in cash and in the bank.
- A person in the household is a migrant or seasonal farm worker and you have no more than \$100 in cash and in the bank.

### **Are there work requirements to get food stamps?**

**No.** During the COVID-19 pandemic, **there are no work requirements for adults and students.**

### **How will I get my food stamps?**

DES will send you an Electronic Benefit Transfer (“EBT”) card. The card is used like a debit card. You will create a 4-digit personal identification number to use your card. You can check your food stamp balance by telephone or online.

### **What if I get food stamps now and my time to renew is soon?**

If you were told to renew your food stamp benefits in March, April or May of 2020, DES has decided that you do not need to do anything to renew your benefits. You will continue to get your food stamp benefits without interruption. In the future if DES wants you to renew your benefits, DES will let you know.

### **What if I need someone to help me buy food with my food stamps?**

You can give your EBT (food stamp) card to a trusted family member or friend to shop for you. You do not need to tell DES you are giving these persons permission to buy food for you.

### **Can I use my food stamps to buy prepared food?**

If you are 60 years or older, a person with a disability or homeless, you can use your EBT (food stamp) card to purchase prepared meals from restaurants and the deli section of a grocery store who agree to accept your food stamps. To find out more about this program go to the DES website: [www.azdes.gov](http://www.azdes.gov).

## **What if I disagree with a decision that DES makes about my food stamp benefits?**

If you disagree with DES' decision, you can ask for a hearing before an impartial administrative law judge. You can find information on how to ask for a hearing on your DES decision or on the DES website at [www.azdes.gov](http://www.azdes.gov).

## **How do I apply for food stamps?**

- Submit an application online at [www.healthearizonaplus.gov](http://www.healthearizonaplus.gov).
- Print an application from the Department of Economic Security's website ([https://des.az.gov/documents-center?cshs\\_field\\_dl\\_category\\_tid\\_forms=175](https://des.az.gov/documents-center?cshs_field_dl_category_tid_forms=175)). Fill it out and fax it to the telephone number on the application or mail it to:  
  
Arizona Department of Economic Security  
Family Assistance Administration  
P.O. Box 19009  
Phoenix, Arizona 85005-9009
- If you need help with the application or have questions, call 1-855-432-7587.

There are a few DES offices still open to the public. Check the DES website at [www.azdes.gov](http://www.azdes.gov) to see if an office near you is open if you want to go to the office in-person.

## **Is there help for families with children who are home because of the school closings?**

While schools are closed, several school districts are providing free meal delivery and pickup for students. Check with your local school district to find out what your child's school is doing about free meals.

## **What if I am elderly or a person with a disability and need hot meals delivered?**

There are programs to bring meals to the homes of older persons and persons with a disability. Contact your local Area Agency on Aging to find out more about home-delivered meals.

## **How can I get help from a food bank?**

The Arizona Association of Food Banks offers an online directory of food banks at <http://www.azfoodbanks.org/index.php/foodbank/index>. Enter your zip code to locate the nearest food bank in your area.

## **What if I need medical help?**

There are other programs available to help you through these difficult times. You can apply for the Arizona Health Care Cost Containment System (“AHCCCS”) health insurance benefits and food stamps in the same application. See the information above to apply.

## **What about unemployment insurance?**

You can apply for unemployment benefits:

- Online at [www.azui.com](http://www.azui.com) and click the button “Apply for UI Benefits.” You can apply any time between 12:00 am on Sunday through 6:00 pm on Friday.
- By phone at 1-877-600-2722.
- A paper application is available in the documents center (UB-105 Arizona Initial Claim for Unemployment Insurance) at [www.azdes.gov](http://www.azdes.gov). The application will tell you where to mail or fax the application.

April 9, 2020.