

School Nutrition Programs

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Being laid off can be stressful enough, but worrying about how you to feed your kids three meals a day shouldn't be.

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The Free and reduced-price school meal program administered by the Montana Office of Public Instruction pays for all or part of the cost of breakfast and lunch for children at school if their families meet income eligibility. By offering healthy and nutritious meals, the program also helps children to learn and grow.

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All foster children can get free meals.

If your family is getting help from the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) or the Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations (FDPIR) programs, your children can also receive free meals.

If you are not enrolled in any of these programs, your family income must be below the limits in order to receive assistance. The most you will pay for a reduced-price lunch is 40-cents.

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There are no resource limits that could affect your eligibility. This program does not look at your resources to see if you can get help. Resources are money in a checking or savings account or other things of value you and your family own.

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If you are receiving any of these benefits you may get a letter in August that says are eligible for free meals. You must take this letter to the school to enroll in the program.

If you don't receive a letter please contact your school to see if you can be directly certified. When you fill out the school meals application you only have to write in the names of your children and your case number(s) and sign your name. If you are applying for a foster child, you only have to write the child's name and the amount of foster care money for personal use, and sign your name. You will have to fill out a new application for each of your foster children.

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You can pick up an application in the office at your child's school.

It may also be mailed to your household during the summer with other school papers.

It is called the Free and Reduced-Price School Meals Application.

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You can apply any time during the school year.

If your child was previously enrolled, you must fill out a new application at the beginning of each school year.

If your income goes down or your household size goes up, you may qualify, even if you didn't qualify before.

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The application will ask for the names of all the children and adults in your household and what your household's monthly income is. You will also need to provide your social security number. If you don't have a social security number, state that on the application and you will still be able to enroll in the program.

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Once you are finished with the application take it to the school office. You may need to show proof of income, so be prepared. The school may also check to make sure the information you gave them is correct.

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Once your application has been turned in, the school will send you a letter in about two weeks to let you know whether or not you qualify for the program.

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Once you are enrolled in the program, your child will receive free or reduced-price meals all school year. You will also have 30 school days into the next school year before you have to reapply.

If your income or household size changes during the year, you do not have to tell the school.

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You do not have to be a U.S. Citizen to enroll in the program. If you, your children or other people living with you are not U.S. citizens, you will still be able to enroll.

If you are an immigrant, you are not a public charge if you receive free or reduced-price school meals. Schools cannot tell the USCIS (INS) if you get help.

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Most schools offer breakfast and if your child is receiving free or reduced-price lunch he or she can also have breakfast if your school offers it. You do not have to apply again for breakfast.

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Other frequently asked questions include:

Does it matter how long I have lived in Montana? No, if you have just moved to the state and meet the qualifications, you can still enroll.

Do all schools in Montana have the free and reduced-price school meal program? No, but the majority of schools do.

Will other kids know that my child is getting free or reduced-price school meals? No. The school has to make sure no one can tell who gets free or reduced-price school meals.

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For more information on the free or reduced-price school meal program contact your local school.