



Children's Defense Fund

FOOD STAMPS, MEDICAID, WIC & CHILD NUTRITION FOR VICTIMS OF HURRICANE KATRINA IN NEW YORK STATE – UPDATED 12/05

As victims of Hurricane Katrina move to New York seeking refuge, many will have no identification, money or resources and will require immediate assistance. New York State has modified their application rules and requirements for public benefits in order to most expeditiously provide emergency help.

Evacuees may apply for public benefits at their local department of social services (LDSS). The LDSS in New York City is the Human Resources Administration (HRA).

FOOD STAMPS

The Food Stamp Program provides benefits that allow households to purchase food. Benefits are distributed through an electronic card (EBT) that may be used at participating stores, supermarkets and farmers' markets. Families must complete an application for food stamps at their local department of social services (LDSS). The LDSS in New York City is the Human Resources Administration. In order to find the location of the closest LDSS/Food Stamp Office, call 1-800-342-3009.

New applications for food stamps

Hurricane evacuees from Alabama, Louisiana and Mississippi are eligible for:

- A full, one-month maximum food stamp benefit for the initial month of application;
- The evacuees must have lived in a county or parish that was declared a disaster area;
- The household must apply by October 31, 2005;
- There are **NO** income or resource eligibility tests for the initial month;
- There are **NO** other non-financial tests for the initial month;
- Households will be deemed separate even if they purchase and prepare meals with others.

Determining income eligibility levels after the initial month:

- Households can self-attest their income through the four month certification period;
- If the exact amount of income is not known, only income that can be determined with reasonable certainty will be counted;
- LDSSs have been instructed to expect that evacuees will have \$0 income in subsequent 4 month period;
- Deductible expenses will be considered when issuing benefits in subsequent months;
- Households' certification period will go through December 31, 2005;
- The \$2,000 debit card issued by FEMA will **NOT** be counted towards resources.

Verifying identity:

- Self-declaration of identity, a collateral statement from someone else, or proof of the debit card issued by FEMA will suffice for proof of identity.

Individuals will be encouraged to select their PIN for their EBT card at the office or center where they applied

Hurricane evacuees who already have food stamps

- Evacuees can use their current EBT card in local stores and continue to use their food stamp benefits during their certification period;
- Victims that need a new EBT card can go to the LDSS for assistance;
- If the evacuee believes he will be living in New York permanently, or in the foreseeable future, an LDSS worker can close the evacuee's current case in the disaster area, and take an application for a new certification.

To obtain information on an individual's food stamp certification status in another state or to obtain a replacement card:

- Mississippi: Certification status: 1-800-948-4060 Replacement card: 1-866-449-9488
- Alabama: Certification status and Replacement card: 1-866-465-2285
- Louisiana: contact information will be posted later

MEDICAID

New York State provides free health insurance for low-income children and adults through Medicaid. Medicaid provides comprehensive coverage for health care services including doctor visits, hospital care, prescription drugs, dental, vision, mental health, emergency room, durable medical equipment and much more.

Applying for Medicaid

Victims of Hurricane Katrina applying for Medicaid will have to complete an *Access New York* application at their LDSS (HRA in NYC) and will be asked about:

- Home Address (applicant should fill out their last address in the state where they fled)
- Social Security Number (If the applicant can not provide a SSN the LDSS can not delay the application. The applicant may be referred to the Social Security Administration office to assist in tracking it down.)
- Disability status, third party coverage, most recent employer's name and location and any other data the applicant can remember and/or verify.
- Applicants will be asked to provide a verifiable form of identification and information about current residence;
- Only income actually received by the family will be counted as income. (For example, if a legally responsible relative with income is in a current state, only income sent to the family in New York will be counted;
- FEMA's \$2,000 debit card will not be counted towards resources;

Evacuees should provide all necessary documentation that they have but the LDSS have been directed to process applications expeditiously if documentation is not available.

Hurricane victims who are determined to be eligible will receive Medicaid for four months. Eligible Hurricane Katrina evacuees are excluded from managed care enrollment.

WIC

WIC is designed to provide nutritious food supplements and nutrition education to low-income pregnant women, women who are breastfeeding, infants and children up to their fifth birthday. WIC provides eligible participants with vouchers for nutritious food items that they redeem at participating retail stores. Foods include infant formula, milk, cheese, eggs, juice, cereal and peanut butter among others.

Hurricane evacuees who already have WIC

Anyone applying in New York State who was on WIC in an affected state will be approved based on their self-declaration of income and residency and can access benefits for the entire certification period for which they are eligible (infants up to 12 months, children for 6 months, pregnant women till birth, breastfeeding women for 12 months). After that, if they are living in New York and are still eligible, they will have to provide information on income and New York State residence. To find the location of a WIC site call the Growing Up Healthy Hotline at 1-800-522-5006.

New applications for WIC

Others who become eligible for WIC because of the hurricane will also be allowed to self-declare their income and residency.

CHILD NUTRITION PROGRAMS

The National School Lunch Program & the School Breakfast Program (School Meals) provide children with free or low-cost nutritious meals during their school day. At the beginning of the school year, households are generally required to complete and return an "Application for Free and Reduced-Price Meals" by the child's school, which asks for household composition and income information.

Evacuees applying for School Meals

Children displaced by Hurricane Katrina may be deemed eligible for free meals in one of the following ways:

- In areas with large numbers of homeless children (mostly areas close to the affected region and where mass relocation has occurred) school officials can keep a roster of children in lieu of collecting applications;
- Families moving in with other households can be classified as homeless, and therefore automatically eligible;
- For families who cannot complete the applications themselves, school administrators can complete the applications on behalf of students relocating to their districts based on their best understanding of the family's economic circumstances;

Children in households receiving Food Stamps or TANF are automatically eligible for free meals; a letter from the local department of social services documenting their enrollment in either of those programs can be used in lieu of an application.

**Please note there are no changes to immigrant eligibility for these programs.
CDF-NY will post updated information on our website as it is made available.**

**For more information, call the Children's Defense Fund – New York
at (212) 697-2323 or visit www.cdfny.org.**