MEPD and Texas Works Bulletin 20-26

Date: November 2, 2020

To: Eligibility Services Supervisors and Staff
    Program Managers
    Regional Directors
    Regional Attorneys
    Hearings Officers

From: Access and Eligibility Services Program Policy
      State Office 2115

Subject: COVID Policy Updates #18

The information in this bulletin provides temporary guidance regarding policies and procedures for processing case actions during the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak. Staff will be notified when the COVID-19 policy and clarifications should no longer be used for processing case actions and determining eligibility. If you have any questions regarding the policy information in this bulletin, follow regional procedures.

Active bulletins are posted on the following websites:

COVID Policy Updates #18

Background
On March 13, 2020, Governor Greg Abbott declared a state of disaster for all counties in Texas due to the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak. On the same date, President Donald J. Trump declared a national emergency. Guidance from state and federal leaders emphasize the need for social distancing and limiting contact with others during this time. In light of this guidance, HHSC is providing the following policy clarifications and temporary changes to eligibility policies to accommodate processing of case actions during this emergency period.

1. Additional Emergency Allotment Supplement

COVID-19 Policy Information

SNAP

HHSC has been granted approval from the Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) to issue November 2020 emergency allotment (EA) supplements to participating Supplemental Nutrition Assistance (SNAP) households. Households who are approved for SNAP in November 2020 will automatically be issued supplements that will bring the household up to the maximum monthly allotment for the household’s size.

All EA supplements will be automatically issued on the SNAP household’s existing EBT card. SNAP households do not need to take any action to receive EA supplements.

Note: SNAP households that already receive the maximum monthly allotment for their household size are not eligible for EA supplements.

Starting November 9, 2020, EA supplements for November will be issued on a randomized staggered schedule. The issuance of November EA supplements for active SNAP households are expected to be completed by November 13, 2020. Households who are determined eligible for SNAP after November 13, 2020, including households who receive a prorated allotment, will be issued their supplement by the end of November.

TIERS will add the following case comment “COVID-19 SNAP supplements issued” for a case where the EA supplement was issued. HHSC will not be sending a notice to households regarding the EA supplement.

Additionally, Quality Control and other case reading reviews are continuing during the pandemic to ensure accuracy. Although SNAP households will receive the
maximum allotment, staff must still ensure regular monthly benefits are calculated correctly when processing any case actions.

**Automation**

November EA supplements for active SNAP households are expected to be issued between November 9, 2020, and November 13, 2020. Any newly certified SNAP households will be issued EA supplements before the end of November.

**Correspondence**

Correspondence changes are not required.

**Handbook**

Handbook updates are not required.

**Training**

Training is not required.

**Effective Date**

This policy is effective with the release of this bulletin. Staff will be notified when the COVID-19 policy and clarifications no longer apply.

2. *Lone Star Card Replacements*

**Current COVID-19 Policy**

**SNAP and TANF**

HHSC local offices will not be issuing replacement cards during the COVID-19 pandemic. If a household needs a replacement Lone Star Card but has recently moved, the household must call the Lone Star Help Desk to request a replacement be mailed to their new address. The Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT) vendor will mail replacement Lone Star cards to new addresses of households that have moved before the address update is completed in TIERS. The EBT vendor will follow existing processes to direct households to make permanent address changes through 2-1-1 or www.yourtexasbenefits.com. (MEPD and Texas Works Bulletin #20-04, COVID-19 Policy Updates #1 [Item #5], released March 23, 2020)

**New Policy**

**SNAP and TANF**

The EBT vendor will no longer mail a replacement Lone Star Card to new addresses of households that have moved before the address update is completed in TIERS. The household’s address must be updated in TIERS before the Lone Star Help Desk will issue a replacement card. Staff must follow policy in TWH B-235.1, Lone Star
Card Replacement Procedures, when a person requests a replacement Lone Star Card.

**Automation**
Automation changes are not required.

**Correspondence**
Correspondence changes are not required.

**Handbook**
Handbook updates are not required.

**Training**
Training is not required.

**Effective Date**
This policy is effective November 1, 2020.

3. **Interviews**

**Current COVID-19 Policy**

**SNAP, TANF and TP 08**
An interview is required at redetermination if it includes a new request for SNAP, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) or TP 08 (Medicaid for Parents and Caretaker Relatives). (MEPD and Texas Works Bulletin #20-23, COVID-19 Policy Updates #16, released on September 18, 2020)

**New COVID-19 Policy**

**SNAP, TANF and TP 08**
An interview is required at redetermination if anyone in the household receives earned income or if it includes a new request for SNAP, TANF or TP 08. Make a cold call to attempt to complete the interview. If the person does not answer or declines the interview, schedule an interview for all interview required programs.

An interview is not required at redetermination if the household does not receive earned income and does not include a new request for SNAP, TANF or TP08. If applicable, process the redetermination as a desk review following policy in TWH B-126, Processing Desk Reviews. Follow the steps provided in MEPD and Texas Works Bulletin #20-05, COVID-19 Policy Updates #2 (Item #2), released on March 27, 2020, to verify identity and bypass the interview requirement in TIERS. For redeterminations that do not meet the criteria for a desk review, follow the steps provided in the TIERS Broadcast released on September 21, 2020 entitled,
“Transition to Pre-COVID Interview Requirements for Combined Applications and SNAP Redeterminations.”

**Note:** When an interview is required, follow normal policy and procedures for denying benefits for a missed appointment. To ensure Medicaid coverage is maintained through the end of the public health emergency, TIERS will automatically prevent active TP 08 EDGs from denying upon disposition.

**Automation**
Automation changes are not required.

**Correspondence**
Correspondence changes are not required.

**Handbook**
Handbook updates are not required.

**Training**
Training is not required.

**Effective Date**
This policy is effective November 2, 2020. Staff will be notified when COVID-19 policy and clarifications no longer apply.