

Q&A for SNAP Recipients in the Event of a Government Shutdown

How likely is it that the government will shut down?

The Obama Administration strongly believes that a lapse in funding should not occur. There is enough time for Congress to prevent it. However, without funding from Congress, USDA is required by law to ensure that it does not spend money it doesn't have. USDA is doing everything it can to notify participants of what those impacts might be.

Will my EBT card stop working if there is a government shutdown?

If we do not have funding from Congress, USDA will have limited funding for SNAP benefits in October and will be forced to stop providing benefits within the first few days of October. Once that occurs, families won't be able to use these benefits at grocery stores to buy the food their families need.

Should I use SNAP benefits I have now to stock up on food before the system goes down?

SNAP benefits are currently available and will remain so through at least the first couple of days in October. Households may use those benefits to stock up on food now so they are prepared if SNAP benefits become inaccessible after the first couple of days in October.

However, some foods cannot be stored safely for long periods of time, while others can be stored safely, and households should take safe storage into consideration when making purchases to prepare for a period when they may not be able to use SNAP benefits. If households use up their benefits and the food goes bad because it wasn't properly stored, they won't have SNAP benefits available when the shutdown ends and the access to benefits is restored. More information about food safety and storing food is available at Foodsafety.gov.

If Congress passes a budget after October 1, how long will it take for my benefits to return?

Just as it will take a few days to block retailers from accepting SNAP EBT cards, it will take a few days to bring retailers back online so they can begin accepting SNAP EBT cards again. USDA will provide ongoing updates so that households, retailers, and states have information they need.

Can I still use left-over benefits from September in October?

No, once retailers are blocked from accepting SNAP EBT benefits, previously issued benefits will not be accessible. Those benefits will become available once retailers are able to accept SNAP benefits again.

Why didn't the government prevent this?

Without funding from Congress, USDA is required by law to ensure that it does not spend money it doesn't have. The Obama Administration strongly believes that a lapse in funding should not occur. There is enough time for Congress to prevent it.

Why can't USDA pay for benefits using contingency funds?

If Congress does not act to provide funding, USDA can use its limited contingency funds to provide some October SNAP benefits. However, USDA would be required by law to ensure that it does not incur

obligations beyond the available funding. To avoid this, USDA would need to take steps to prevent retailers from accepting SNAP EBT benefits during the lapse.

Will my card stop working if Congress passes a last-minute budget?

No. As long as there is no lapse in funding, retailers will continue to be able to accept SNAP benefits without interruption.

Will my cash assistance/TANF/WIC/Unemployment/other benefits on my EBT card stop working as well?

Some states provide other benefits, such as cash assistance through TANF or WIC benefits, on the same EBT card used for SNAP. If Congress does not pass a budget and USDA must block retailers from accepting SNAP EBT benefits, these other benefits will **not** be affected. Families will be able to use cash benefits at stores and retrieve funds from ATM machines as they normally do and WIC benefits will be available for use in stores.

How do I check the balance for my SNAP benefits to know how much I have?

Different states offer different ways to check your balance. However, a couple of easy ways are:

- Check the SNAP balance on your last grocery receipt.
- If your state provides information for your SNAP account on-line, sign in and check your balance on-line.
- Call your [state's EBT customer service number](http://www.fns.usda.gov/snap/ebt/pdfs/state-lines.pdf) (<http://www.fns.usda.gov/snap/ebt/pdfs/state-lines.pdf>). Customer service numbers for clients are located in the left column of the chart.
- Call the toll-free number on the back of your EBT card.

What should I do if I need food right away?

Contact your [regional food bank](http://feedingamerica.org/foodbank-results.aspx) (<http://feedingamerica.org/foodbank-results.aspx>) and ask for the nearest food distribution site. Or call your [state's information line](http://www.fns.usda.gov/snap/contact_info/hotlines.htm) (http://www.fns.usda.gov/snap/contact_info/hotlines.htm) and ask for the nearest food pantry or food distribution site.

I am a retailer. Should I expect an increase in SNAP customers at the end of September?

Yes. As we approach the end of September and as the threat of a lapse in funding becomes more imminent, it is very likely that you will need additional stock to serve customers who are using up their September benefits to be prepared in the event of a shutdown. In addition, if Congress fails to provide funding, you may have a large increase in business from SNAP recipients for the first few days of October as customers will anticipate that their cards will soon not work.

As a retailer, if the card readers stop working, can I process the transaction as I would during a routine outage?

No. If USDA has to prevent retailers from using the SNAP EBT system, it means that funds are not available for SNAP purchases; you should not process any SNAP transactions until the system is back up and accepting and approving SNAP transactions.