

November 9, 2020

CALIFORNIA DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SERVICES

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

ALL COUNTY WELFARE DIRECTORS LETTER

The purpose of this letter is to provide County Welfare Departments with information and guidance regarding the upcoming implementation of the Disaster Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, known as Disaster CalFresh (D-CalFresh) in California. California is approved to operate D-CalFresh in the following ten counties: Fresno, Los Angeles, Madera, Mendocino, Napa, San Bernardino, San Diego, Shasta, Siskiyou, and Sonoma.



KIM JOHNSON
DIRECTOR

STATE OF CALIFORNIA—HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES AGENCY
DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SERVICES
744 P Street • Sacramento, CA 95814 • www.cdss.ca.gov



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November 9, 2020

ALL COUNTY WELFARE DIRECTORS LETTER (ACWDL)

TO: ALL COUNTY WELFARE DIRECTORS

FROM: JENNIFER HERNANDEZ, DEPUTY DIRECTOR
FAMILY ENGAGEMENT AND EMPOWERMENT DIVISION

SUBJECT: DISASTER CALFRESH NOVEMBER 2020: FRESNO, LOS ANGELES, MADERA, MENDOCINO, NAPA, SAN BERNARDINO, SAN DIEGO, SHASTA, SISKIYOU AND SONOMA COUNTIES

REFERENCE: [H.R. 6201 FAMILIES FIRST CORONAVIRUS RESPONSE ACT](#); [UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE, FOOD AND NUTRITION SERVICE DISASTER SNAP GUIDANCE](#); [ALL COUNTY WELFARE DIRECTORS LETTER \(ACWDL\) SEPTEMBER 1, 2020](#); [ACWDL OCTOBER 5, 2020](#); [ALL COUNTY LETTER \(ACL\) 19-55](#); [ACL 18-125](#); [ALL COUNTY INFORMATION NOTICE I-63-19](#)

The purpose of this letter is to provide County Welfare Departments (CWDs) with information and guidance regarding the upcoming implementation of Disaster Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), known as Disaster CalFresh (D-CalFresh) in California. Due to the record number of wildfires burning in numerous counties throughout the state and the Presidential declaration of Major Disaster with Individual Assistance, California is approved to **operate D-CalFresh between Monday, November 16 and Friday, November 20, 2020** in the following ten counties: Fresno, Los Angeles, Madera, Mendocino, Napa, San Bernardino, San Diego, Shasta, Siskiyou, and Sonoma. These ten counties are referred to as the “impacted counties” throughout this letter.

D-CalFresh provides temporary food assistance to households affected by natural disaster. Eligible disaster impacted households who are not already receiving CalFresh at the time of the disaster will be provided with one month of food benefits.

To be eligible for D-CalFresh, a household must live or work in the disaster area at the time of the disaster, plan to purchase food during the benefit period, experience adverse effects due to the disaster, and meet the D-CalFresh income guidelines.

Based on the United States Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) approval of California's D-CalFresh plan for November 2020, this letter provides information and guidance regarding general D-CalFresh policy, details specific to this November 2020 operation, outreach and administration.

DISASTER IMPACT AND CORONAVIRUS DISEASE 2019 (COVID-19) PANDEMIC EMERGENCY

Wildfires

At the beginning of September 2020, Santa Ana and Diablo wind events, and increased offshore winds across the state, combined with a heat wave, resulted in several Red Flag warnings due to critical fire weather conditions. Combined with very dry relative humidity and dry fuels across the state, these conditions led to new and significant wildfires that spread rapidly across California. On October 16, 2020, in response to these wildfires, California was granted a Presidential Declaration of Disaster with Individual Assistance for Fresno, Los Angeles, Madera, Mendocino, San Bernardino, San Diego, and Siskiyou Counties. On October 22, 2020, Napa, Shasta and Sonoma Counties were added to this Presidential Declaration.

COVID-19 Pandemic Emergency

On March 19, 2020, California issued a statewide "Stay-at-Home" order, which led to a phased reopening beginning on May 8, 2020. While some restrictions have been lifted, many sectors remain closed to the public or are implementing revised operational strategies in order to adhere to social distancing protocols. These public health requirements make in-person D-CalFresh operations a challenge for both CWDs and clients alike. This D-CalFresh plan emphasizes a phone-based approach that focuses on maintaining the health and safety of those involved. Two flexibilities employed in this plan include phone interviews for D-CalFresh applicants and allowing documented telephonic signatures.

GENERAL D-CALFRESH POLICY

For a household to be eligible for D-CalFresh benefits, they must meet the following criteria:

- Lived or worked in the disaster area at the time of the disaster;
- Purchased or planned to purchase food during the benefit period;
- Experienced an adverse effect due to the disaster; and
- Meet the Disaster Gross Income Limit (DGIL).

Residency or Work

To be eligible for D-CalFresh, a household must have lived or worked in the disaster area at the time of the disaster. Households are eligible if they are temporarily residing outside of the disaster impacted county, such as those displaced due to mandatory evacuations, at the time of application. Households must be residing in California at the time of application to remain eligible for D-CalFresh.

Purchasing Food

To be eligible for D-CalFresh, a household must have purchased or planned to purchase food during the benefit period.

Adverse Effects

To be eligible for D-CalFresh, a household must have experienced an adverse effect due to the disaster. Adverse effects include food loss, loss of income, inaccessible resources, or incurred disaster-related expenses. The household must have experienced one or more of these adverse effects.

Disaster Gross Income Limit

Unlike regular CalFresh, which includes a separate test for income and resources, the DGIL groups income and resources together under one test. The household's take home income received (or expected to be received) during the benefit period plus its accessible liquid resources minus disaster related expenses (unreimbursed disaster related expenses paid or anticipated to be paid out of pocket during the disaster benefit period) must not exceed the DGIL.

When determining the DGIL, it is recommended that CWDs ask specific questions about potential loss of income or disaster expenses. For example, did the household lose wages, incur expenses securing temporary shelter or replacing personal and household items, such as clothing. It may be difficult for individuals and families impacted by a disaster to recall all deductible expenses given the stressful nature of the situation. Disaster expenses include expenses that the household has paid or expects to pay out-of-pocket during the disaster benefit period. If the household has received or anticipates receiving a reimbursement for these expenses during the disaster period, only the net expense is deductible.

D-CalFresh Household Composition

A D-CalFresh household includes those people who lived together and purchased and prepared food together on the start date of the disaster. A D-CalFresh household does not include those people with whom the applicant is temporarily staying with at the time of application due to the disaster.

A D-CalFresh household may include an individual(s) who had been excluded from an ongoing CalFresh household at the time of the disaster. For example, an ineligible student, who was excluded from a CalFresh household at the time of the disaster may apply for D-CalFresh if they meet the eligibility criteria (described below). The previously excluded individual must complete the D-CalFresh application, including the interview and submission of required verifications.

D-CalFresh Verification

Verification rules are eased during a disaster. Eligibility staff should exercise reasonable judgment when evaluating the accuracy of applicant statements. D-CalFresh has three verification requirements:

1. Identity must be verified;
2. Residency and loss/inaccessibility of income or liquid resources should be verified if possible; and
3. Household composition and food loss, if questionable.

While identity verification is required, a specific type of documentary proof is not. Acceptable identity verification may include, but is not limited to, a driver's license, a work or school identification card, an identification card for health benefits, a voter registration card, a foreign passport, and "matricula consulares." If documentary proof is not available, identity may be verified through collateral contact. Please note that a social security number is not required to apply for D-CalFresh.

To the extent possible, verification of residency should be accomplished via information from other sources, such as a rent or mortgage billing statement, utility billing statement, and identity documents. No specific type of documentary proof is required.

Each disaster is unique, and the availability of verification will vary from household to household. Public information should indicate that applicants are expected to bring all available verification documents. CWDs should assist households in securing necessary verifications, especially if documents have been lost due to the disaster. This may include, with the client's permission, verifying information through alternative sources such as online banking or utility accounts and using collateral contacts when appropriate. If verification is not readily available due to unusual circumstances caused by the disaster, such as structure loss or evacuation, eligibility staff will assist the applicant in securing necessary verifications.

Benefit Issuance

Certified households should be able to access their benefits within 72 hours of application (except in cases of delayed issuance for questionable applications).

For additional detailed guidance on D-CalFresh eligibility, the DGIL and determining the D-CalFresh allotment, reference the [Disaster SNAP Guidance](#) released by the FNS.

Authorized Representative

An Authorized Representative (AR) may be used for D-CalFresh following the same policy rules as regular CalFresh. As an adult non-household member who is authorized to act on behalf of a household, an AR is rightfully able to:

- Complete a D-CalFresh application for a household;
- Submit the necessary verification requirements for a household; and/or
- Use the Electronic Benefits Transfer (EBT) card to purchase food for the household.

An individual AR may represent more than one impacted household. The designation of an AR can be established on the D-CalFresh application form, using the regular CalFresh AR designation form, or via a signed written statement from the household. If the household requires an AR to submit the application on their behalf, the identity of both the AR and responsible household member must be verified. Detailed information regarding AR restrictions and responsibilities can be found in [All County Letter \(ACL\) 19-55](#) released on May 31, 2019.

Duplicate Participation

Disaster impacted counties must screen for duplicate participation before issuing D-CalFresh benefits. Households may not receive D-CalFresh and regular CalFresh benefits at the same time. Additionally, households may only be approved for D-CalFresh once during the benefit period. CWDs will reference the Statewide Automated Welfare System (SAWS) and Medi-Cal Eligibility Data System (MEDS) to determine duplicate participation before completing the D-CalFresh eligibility determination.

Employee Applications

County employee cases will be processed by lead workers or unit supervisors who currently work confidential cases. All CWD employee cases will be reviewed after the disaster period. These cases will be tracked at application and sorted accordingly to ensure review. No other staff will have access to employee cases and the lead worker or unit supervisor working the case will not be in the same unit as the aided employee.

NOVEMBER 2020 D-CALFRESH OPERATION

The following details are specific to the upcoming D-CalFresh operation in Fresno, Los Angeles, Madera, Mendocino, Napa, San Bernardino, San Diego, Shasta, Siskiyou, and Sonoma Counties.

Application Period

The application period for people affected by the disaster in the impacted counties extends through five consecutive days:

- Monday, November 16, 2020 through Friday, November 20, 2020.

D-CalFresh Benefit Period

Because the fires started on different dates, different benefit periods will be used by counties to determine D-CalFresh eligibility. The benefit periods for the impacted counties are:

- Fresno and Madera: September 4, 2020 through October 3, 2020
- San Bernardino and San Diego: September 5, 2020 through October 4, 2020
- Los Angeles: September 6, 2020 through October 5, 2020
- Mendocino: September 7, 2020 through October 6, 2020
- Siskiyou: September 8, 2020 through October 7, 2020
- Napa, Shasta, and Sonoma: September 27, 2020 through October 26, 2020

D-CalFresh Application

D-CalFresh applicants must complete the *Application for Disaster CalFresh* (CF 385) and it must be submitted during the D-CalFresh application period. For this operation, the D-CalFresh applications can be submitted by phone, online, or in-person. Due to the limited D-CalFresh application period, D-CalFresh applications will not be accepted through the mail.

Signature Flexibility

When accepting D-CalFresh applications by phone, disaster impacted counties will document in the case file that a client verbally attested to the information provided on the application. The disaster impacted counties will document the applicant's name, date and time of application, a summary of the information to which the client verbally assents, and the applicant's response indicating agreement or disagreement (i.e. Yes or No). Such documentation will fulfill the requirements for a signed application for households who apply over the phone or who have applied without a signature. Additionally, if the household submitted a paper application without a signature, then the CWD must also note on the paper application that verbal attestation of the signature was given.

Interviews

Due to public health requirements related to COVID-19, for this operation D-CalFresh interviews will be completed by phone.

D-CalFresh Household Composition

D-CalFresh household composition is established as of the start date of the disaster. In this case, like the benefit period, the start dates of each disaster vary by county. The start date of the disaster for the impacted counties are as follows:

- Fresno and Madera: September 4, 2020
- San Bernardino and San Diego: September 5, 2020
- Los Angeles: September 6, 2020
- Mendocino: September 7, 2020
- Siskiyou: September 8, 2020
- Napa, Shasta, and Sonoma: September 27, 2020

Verification Submission

D-CalFresh applicant households will have several options for submitting verifications. Options include submission via the SAWS client portals, secure email or fax, and submission at in-person application sites.

D-CalFresh Allotment

Because the disasters covered for this operation officially started in Federal Fiscal Year (FFY) 2020, the FFY 2020 D-CalFresh DGIL and allotments will be used. The DGIL and allotment by household size were released by [All County Information Notice \(ACIN\) I-63-19](#) released on October 14, 2019.

Electronic Benefits Transfer (EBT)

D-CalFresh benefits will be issued through the statewide EBT system. Regardless of the method of application submission, households who have been determined eligible for D-CalFresh will pick up their cards in person at designated EBT card pick-up locations in order to meet the D-CalFresh three-day timeframe. D-CalFresh pick up will be coordinated at the time of the eligibility determination.

If a D-CalFresh eligible household is displaced or no longer residing in the disaster impacted county, the county will coordinate with the county where the household is currently located to allow the household to obtain the EBT card within the three-day timeframe. The disaster impacted county will coordinate with the county where the household is located and will send the necessary information to the local EBT printer. This will allow the displaced household to quickly and securely pick up their EBT card without requiring them to return to the impacted disaster area.

In the case that an eligible household is unable to pick up their EBT card due to COVID-19 health and safety precautions, the disaster impacted county may mail the household their EBT card upon request. In this scenario, the disaster impacted county will advise the eligible household that their EBT card may not arrive within the 3-day timeframe.

Some counties have requested pre-printed and pre-embossed EBT cards. These cards will say "Disaster" in the place of the applicant's name.

D-CalFresh Three-Day Timeframe

For this operation, the D-CalFresh three-day timeframe will start on the day of the interview. The day an applicant completes their interview with eligibility staff will be considered the filing date of the application, regardless of the date of application submission.

Ongoing CalFresh Households

Ongoing CalFresh households are not eligible to receive supplemental D-CalFresh benefits under this plan, as they are already receiving Emergency Allotments due to COVID-19 and are at the maximum allotment for their household size.

D-CALFRESH OUTREACH

Outreach is an essential component of the CalFresh disaster response. The CDSS will provide D-CalFresh information for this operation on the CDSS webpage <https://www.cdss.ca.gov/inforesources/calfresh/disaster-calfresh>. The CDSS will also issue public facing materials such as a press release, flyers, visual guides, and social media posts. All public facing materials will be provided to counties in English and Spanish.

D-CALFRESH ADMINISTRATION

D-CalFresh Daily Reporting Requirements

A State operating D-CalFresh must submit a daily report to FNS.

During the application period, the CDSS will provide daily reports, as well as a summary report after operations end, with the following information for each approved county:

- The number of online applications received.
- The number of paper applications received.
- The number of households and persons approved for D-CalFresh
- The amount of disaster benefits issued to approved households.
- The number of households denied based on their eligibility.
- The average issuance amount per household.

During the application period, the CDSS will provide FNS with a daily narrative describing the status of, and any updates to, its telephone interview operations.

To meet this requirement, impacted counties must submit daily reports beginning the day following the first day of D-CalFresh operations and on a daily basis until all applications are processed. Reports must be submitted each day even if no or very few D-CalFresh applications have been submitted. Each county operating D-CalFresh will work with the CDSS to fulfil this requirement.

Other D-CalFresh Reporting Requirements

D-CalFresh cases and their benefits **should not** be reported on the *Food Stamp Program Participation and Benefit Issuance Report* (DFA 256) or the *CalFresh Monthly Caseload Movement Statistical Report* (CF 296).

Administrative Claiming

Administrative costs related to D-CalFresh should be claimed in accordance with normal CalFresh processes. Costs should be tracked as described in [County Fiscal Letter \(CFL\) 17/18-31](#) released on October 13, 2017. Any questions regarding this CFL should be directed to Fiscal.Systems@dss.ca.gov.

Post-Disaster D-CalFresh Quality Control (QC) Review

FNS requires the State conduct a comprehensive review of general D-CalFresh program performance and reviews of individual cases. The individual case reviews must consist of a random sample of 0.5 percent of D-CalFresh cases (minimum of 25, maximum of 500), both approved and denied. In addition, the State is required to complete a review of 100 percent of CWD employee cases that were approved for and received D-CalFresh benefits. Outcomes of the D-CalFresh QC review process will have no impact on the State's annual CalFresh error rate.

Due to the unique nature of this operation, the CDSS will also review a statistically significant percentage of households certified through telephone interviews as part of its Post-Disaster Report. FNS will specify this amount for the CDSS after operations ends.

If you have any questions about this ACWDL or D-CalFresh guidelines and regulations, please contact CalFreshPolicy@dss.ca.gov.