

March 4, 2024

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 San Diego County.



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DIRECTOR

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GAVIN NEWSOM
GOVERNOR

March 4, 2024

ALL COUNTY WELFARE DIRECTORS LETTER

TO: ALL COUNTY WELFARE DIRECTORS

FROM: ALEXIS FERNÁNDEZ GARCIA, DEPUTY DIRECTOR
FAMILY ENGAGEMENT AND EMPOWERMENT DIVISION

SUBJECT: DISASTER CALFRESH MARCH 2024: SAN DIEGO COUNTY

REFERENCE: [UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE, FOOD AND NUTRITION SERVICE DISASTER SNAP GUIDANCE](#); [ALL COUNTY LETTER \(ACL\) 19-55](#); [ACL 18-125](#); [ACL 23-92](#); [ALL COUNTY INFORMATION NOTICE \(ACIN\) I-55-23](#); [COUNTY FISCAL LETTER \(CFL\) 17/18-31](#); [CFL 18/19-25](#)

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 severe winter storms and flooding and the Presidential Major Disaster Declaration with Individual Assistance (IA), California is approved to operate D-CalFresh in San Diego County. San Diego County is referred to as the “impacted county” throughout this letter.

D-CalFresh provides temporary food assistance to households affected by natural disasters. 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. It can also facilitate the issuance of supplemental CalFresh benefits for ongoing CalFresh households up to the maximum monthly allotment for one month.

Based on the United States Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) approval of California’s D-CalFresh plan for March 2024, this letter provides information and guidance regarding general D-CalFresh policy,

March 2024 operation, outreach, and administration.

DISASTER IMPACT

Winter Storms

Throughout January 2024, the State of California experienced a series of severe storms, consisting of heavy rain and strong winds that forced residents from their homes, left thousands without power, and damaged vital infrastructure in many areas. These relentless winter storms caused dangerous floods and mudslides, fallen trees, and record levels of rainfall in the impacted area. These factors severely damaged roadways, power utility equipment, and residential neighborhoods. Hundreds of thousands of homes throughout California were without power, ranging from several days to weeks without electricity. Disaster and emergency response personnel worked around the clock to fix the damage caused by heavy rainfall, strong winds, fallen trees, flooding, and landslides.

- On Tuesday, January 23, 2024, California Governor Gavin Newsom issued a [State of Emergency](#) for San Diego County due to the impacts of the storms that occurred in January 2024.
- On Monday, February 19, 2024, President Joe Biden issued a Presidential Major Disaster Declaration with IA ([FEMA-4758-DR](#)) for San Diego County due to the severe winter storms and flooding that occurred Sunday, January 21, 2024, through Tuesday, January 23, 2024.

GENERAL D-CALFRESH POLICY

Eligibility

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

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

Residency or Work

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

still apply for D-CalFresh, should all other eligibility criteria be met (i.e., lived or worked in the disaster area at the time of the disaster, verifications, etc.).

Purchasing Food

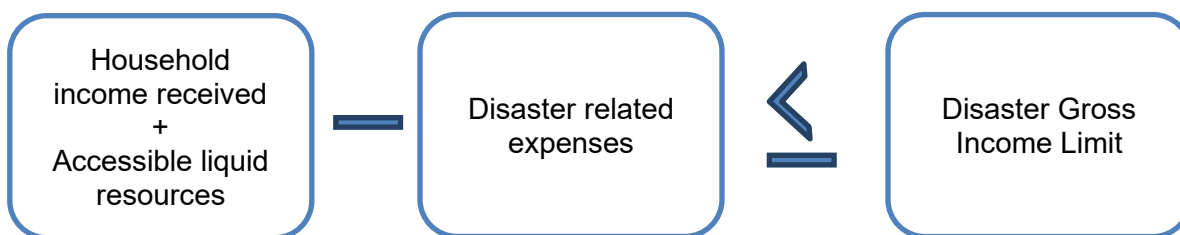
To be eligible for D-CalFresh, a household must have purchased or plan to purchase food during the benefit period.

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 (DGIL)

Unlike regular CalFresh, which includes a separate test for income and resources, the DGIL combines income and resources 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.



Disaster expenses include expenses that the household paid out-of-pocket during the disaster benefit period. When determining the DGIL, it is recommended that CWDs ask clarifying questions about potential loss of income or disaster expenses. For example, did the household lose wages, or 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. If the household has received or anticipates receiving a reimbursement for these expenses during the disaster period, only the net expense is deductible.

The most recent DGIL was released in the [All County Information Notice \(ACIN\) I-55-23](#) published on September 26, 2023.

D-CalFresh Household Composition

A D-CalFresh household includes people who lived 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 judgement when evaluating the accuracy of applicant statements. The following verification requirements must be met for D-CalFresh:

1. Identity;
2. Residency and loss/inaccessibility of income or liquid resources, if possible;
3. Household composition; and
4. Food loss, when 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 electronic verification or 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 satisfied 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 must 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.

Benefit Issuance

Certified households must be able to access their benefits within 72 hours of application. Cases of delayed issuance for questionable applications must allow

households to access their benefits within seven days of application, if eligible.

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

The disaster impacted county 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 California Statewide Automated Welfare System (CalSAWS) and Medi-Cal Eligibility Data System (MEDS) to determine duplicate participation before completing the D-CalFresh eligibility determination.

Ongoing CalFresh households may receive supplemental D-CalFresh benefits. An excluded member of an ongoing CalFresh household may apply for and be eligible for D-CalFresh benefits, such as an ineligible student or noncitizen. Please note ongoing CalFresh households that received the maximum monthly allotment for their household size during the benefit month will not be eligible for the disaster supplements.

Employee Applications

County employee cases will be processed by unit supervisors or investigators 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 unit

supervisor or investigator working the case will not be in the same unit as the aided employee.

Applications Submitted in Another County

Regardless of whether a D-CalFresh application is submitted in a non-impacted county or impacted county, all CWDs will provide individuals and families who are impacted by the disaster and are displaced with access to D-CalFresh. As a reminder, each county must have a designated D-CalFresh Point of Contact (D-POC) who will be responsible for receiving all D-CalFresh applications submitted in their county. County staff should be familiar with their designated D-POC so that received D-CalFresh applications may be routed properly and in a timely manner to the D-POC. The D-POC will immediately provide the D-CalFresh application to the appropriate impacted county, and as requested by the impacted county, support the impacted county's application processing for that displaced applicant. This support may include the D-POC, on behalf of the impacted county, providing and documenting the face-to-face interview and collecting any verifications. If the impacted county determines the displaced applicant is eligible for D-CalFresh, the D-POC may also coordinate and supervise the cross-county printing of the EBT card for the displaced applicant.

MARCH 2024: D-CALFRESH OPERATION

The following details are specific to the upcoming D-CalFresh operation in San Diego County.

Application Period

The application period for people affected by the disaster in the impacted county extends through seven non-consecutive days:

- Thursday, March 7, 2024, to Friday, March 8, 2024.
- Monday, March 11, 2024, to Friday, March 15, 2024.

D-CalFresh Filing Date

The D-CalFresh filing date is the day that the interview is completed and not the day that the application was received. For example, an application received on Monday, March 11, 2024, with an interview completed on Wednesday, March 13, 2024, will have a filing date of Wednesday, March 13, 2024. The D-CalFresh filing date begins the 72-hour timeframe to make benefits available (described in more detail below).

D-CalFresh Benefit Period

The 30-day disaster benefit period is from Sunday, January 21, 2024, through Monday, February 19, 2024.

D-CalFresh Application

D-CalFresh applicants must complete the *Application for Disaster CalFresh* (CF 385)

and submit the completed form during the D-CalFresh application period. For this operation, the D-CalFresh application can be completed by phone or in-person. Due to the limited D-CalFresh application period, D-CalFresh applications will not be accepted through the mail.

Supplements for Ongoing CalFresh Households

Supplements bring eligible ongoing CalFresh households impacted by the disaster up to the maximum allotment for their household size. Ongoing CalFresh households must complete the *Replacement or Disaster Supplement Affidavit* (CF 303) which attests to disaster loss and submit the completed form during the D-CalFresh application period. For this operation, the CF 303 can be completed by phone, in-person, or online. Ongoing CalFresh households do not need to complete a D-CalFresh application or interview to receive supplemental CalFresh benefits.

Signature Flexibility

When accepting D-CalFresh applications by phone, the disaster impacted county will document in the case file that a client verbally attested to the information provided on the application. The disaster impacted county will document the applicant's name, authorized representative if appropriate, 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 a household submits a paper application without a signature, then the CWDs must also note on the paper application that verbal attestation of the signature was given.

Interviews

D-CalFresh interviews should be completed in-person when possible. For this operation D-CalFresh interviews can also be completed by phone. For online pre-registrants, the county must make three attempts to reach the applicant for an interview, providing a reasonable amount of time between each attempt. After the county has made three unsuccessful attempts, it becomes the household's responsibility to contact the county to complete the interview during the D-CalFresh application period in order to complete their application.

Per FNS guidance, county supervisors will provide immediate, onsite or phone-based supervisory review for denied applicants if requested.

Reminder Notice

If an online application does not have a phone number, the county must provide the applicant with a reminder notice via priority mail. The D-CalFresh reminder notice will serve to notify the household that the interview component of the process is still outstanding, and to encourage the applicant to contact the CWD to complete the

interview, via telephone or in-person.

CWDs must generate a freeform notice which includes the language below, appropriate phone number, and address where the D-CalFresh interview can be conducted in person if the applicant so chooses. The language of the reminder notice is as follows:

“You are receiving this letter because you submitted a pre-registration online application for participation in the Disaster CalFresh program and your phone number was not included. As a reminder, an interview is required in order for your county to determine eligibility for the Disaster CalFresh program.

Please call (XXX) XXX-XXXX or go to your county CalFresh office listed below to complete the interview no later than Wednesday, March 20, 2024.

Disaster CalFresh In-Person Site Address:

XXXX STREET NAME

CITY, STATE, ZIP CODE

HOURS OF OPERATION:

[DAY(S) OF THE WEEK

TIMES OF THE DAY]”

D-CalFresh Household Composition

D-CalFresh household composition is established as of the start date of the disaster which began on Sunday, January 21, 2024.

Verification Submission

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

D-CalFresh Allotment

Because the disasters covered in this operation officially started in Federal Fiscal Year (FFY) 2024, the FFY 2024 D-CalFresh DGIL and allotments will be used. The DGIL and allotment by household size were released by the [ACIN I-55-23](#) on September 26, 2023.

Application Processing and D-CalFresh 72-Hour Timeframe

Applications must be processed in the order they are submitted, regardless of the method of submission. As described above, D-CalFresh benefits must be made available within 72-hours of completing the D-CalFresh application process, unless there is a delay because the application is questionable. The D-CalFresh 72-hour timeframe begins on the filing date of the application, which is the day the interview is complete. When information is questionable, this timeframe may be extended up to seven days to allow households additional time to provide verifications.

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 72-hour 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 area, the county will coordinate cross-county printing where the household is currently located to allow access to the EBT card within the 72-hour timeframe without requiring them to return to the impacted disaster area. The disaster impacted county will coordinate with the county where the household is located and send the necessary information to the local EBT printer. In the case that an eligible household is unable to pick up their EBT card, counties may priority mail out EBT cards but must meet the 72-hour timeframe. Counties must contact a household who misses their scheduled EBT card pick-up to determine whether the household wants to coordinate a new EBT card pick-up day/time or to priority mail out the EBT card.

Skimming and Scamming

If a CWD receives a report of electronic theft of D-CalFresh benefits by skimming or scamming, the CWD must follow policies outlined in [ACL 23-92](#) released on November 6, 2023, and treat the replacement request for D-CalFresh benefits consistent with a request for replacement of regular CalFresh benefits.

MARCH 2024: PRE-REGISTRATION

D-CalFresh eligible households will be able to pre-register for D-CalFresh by submitting a completed CF 385 online or in-person. Pre-registrations will be accepted in San Diego County at www.benefitscal.com during the D-CalFresh pre-registration and application period.

Pre-registration will allow households to apply for D-CalFresh beginning on Tuesday, March 5, 2024, through Friday, March 15, 2024, and can submit required D-CalFresh verifications via online portal. The county may take up to 24 hours to initiate a telephone call to households who pre-register to complete a phone interview during the application period based on the order in which their pre-registration was received. The county will attempt to call pre-registrants to complete the interview by phone a minimum of three times during the application period. As a reminder, if the pre-registration does not include a phone number, the county will send the household a reminder letter and the household will need to call the county to complete the interview no later than Wednesday, March 20, 2024.

Please note, a pre-registration for D-CalFresh is not an application for D-CalFresh. After submission of an online or in-person pre-registration, the telephone or in-person interview must be completed to process a D-CalFresh application. As a reminder, the interview must only be completed during the D-CalFresh application period, Wednesday, March 7, 2024, through Friday, March 15, 2024; or during the additional processing period, Monday, March 18, 2024, through Wednesday, March 20, 2024.

D-CALFRESH OUTREACH

Outreach is an essential component of the CalFresh disaster response. The California Department of Social Services (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 pre-registrations received online.
- The number of paper applications received onsite.
- The number of phone applications received. (Phone applications include pre-registrations received online once an interview is completed).
- 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 number of pending cases remaining each day.
- The average issuance amount per household.
- The number of households and persons issued supplemental benefits.
- The amount of supplements issued to ongoing households.
- The average supplemental issuance per household.

CDSS will also provide FNS additional data regarding telephonic interview operations including, but not limited to:

- Average wait time for an interview.
- Number of calls answered.

- Number of calls abandoned.
- Average call completion time.
- Number of applicant complaints regarding difficulty obtaining an interview.
- Number of fair hearing requests for telephonic interviews.
- Information regarding card issuance, such as number of cards picked up, number of cards mailed, number of cards returned in the mail.

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

To meet this requirement, the impacted county must submit daily reports beginning on Friday, March 8, 2024, until all applications are processed. **Reports must be submitted each day even if no or very few D-CalFresh applications have been submitted.** The impacted county will work with the CDSS to fulfill 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 and [CFL 18/19-25](#) released on September 28, 2018. 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 to conduct a comprehensive review of general D-CalFresh program performance and individual cases. The individual case reviews must consist of a random sample of 1 percent of D-CalFresh cases (minimum of 50, maximum of 1,000), both approved and denied. In addition, the State is required to complete a review of 100 percent of all CWD employee cases. Outcomes of the D-CalFresh QC review process will have no impact on the State's annual CalFresh error rate.

If you have any questions or need additional guidance regarding the information in this letter, contact the CalFresh Policy and Employment Bureau at CalFreshPolicy@dss.ca.gov.