

Allegheny County

Food Access FAQs

In these challenging times, there are many questions around access to food, both among those who rely on specific human services programs and those who looking for assistance for the first time. The FAQ below is intended to provide additional detail for county residents (and the services providers supporting them) who need help accessing food at this time.

It is important to note that county residents can always call 2-1-1 (<http://pa211sw.org>) or contact the Greater Pittsburgh Community Food Bank (www.pittsburghfoodbank.org or 412-460-3663) for help. Both the Food Bank and 2-1-1 are equipped to assess needs and connect to a variety of community partners who can help with SNAP applications, food pantries, grab and go sites, and more. The information below provides additional information about the various food resources available for families and individuals in Allegheny County.

Public Benefits

What food-related public benefits are available, and what are the eligibility requirements?

The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) previously called the Food Stamp program, provides low-income individuals and families with assistance to purchase food. SNAP is an income-based eligibility program. Complete guidelines and income eligibility can be found on the [PA Department of Human Services website](#).

How do you apply for SNAP?

Applying for SNAP is strongly recommended for any individual or family who may be eligible. Individuals and families can fill out a SNAP application online through the [COMPASS benefit system](#) or print one from the website and mail it. The [Greater Pittsburgh Community Food Bank](#) and [Just Harvest](#) both offer support for filling out the application.

Where can you use SNAP?

Once approved, households will receive a SNAP debit card that can be used in many stores in the region. SNAP cards cannot currently be used for online payment. While a grocery order may be placed online (if a certain store has that option), the SNAP card must be presented at the store location by a trusted person who has the appropriate PIN.

Food Distribution

Where can you find food?

A food map, [available here](#) maintained in partnership with the Food Bank, provides an updated listing of food pantries and other emergency food options around the county. The map is searchable for specific food needs (such as “grab and go” school meals or senior meals) and lists site addresses, hours of operation and contact information if available. If you are in need of diapers or hygiene products (items not covered by SNAP), locations to get these items are also identified on the food map.

There are different types of food distribution happening at this time:

- **Local food pantries and partner agencies:** There are several food pantries and other emergency food distribution sites located around the county. These pantries distribute food boxes on established days and times. These pantries are an important food source for families and individuals at all times, and despite the challenges related to covid-19, over 90% pantries are still in operation. Calling ahead is recommended to confirm hours are accurate and ask about any necessary documentation at this time.
- **Food Bank distributions:** In addition to pantries, the Food Bank holds food distributions at specific times and locations around the county. At this time, these are large-scale events and can have long wait times. For this reason, they are best suited for households who are not connected with a local pantry. Distribution times and locations are available on the food bank's website.
- **Grab and Go locations (for families with children):** Because schools are closed, school districts, the Food Bank, and Citiparks are all sponsoring Grab and Go locations across the county in partnership with community-based organizations. Grab and Go locations can be found on the food map referenced above, and on the Food Bank and individual school district websites.

As noted above, county residents can always call 2-1-1 (<http://pa211sw.org>) or contact the Greater Pittsburgh Community Food Bank (www.pittsburghfoodbank.org) for help finding the food options that best match needs.

Where can I find formula?

The food map includes locations of Family Centers throughout the county that are able to provide some grab-and-go formula for families. Use the contact information in the map to call ahead to arrange a pick-up, as these spaces are not open to the public.

What if I can't leave my house to get food?

A friend, relative, or service provider (e.g. home visitor, case worker, etc) may pick up food boxes at pantries, but many sites have guidelines around what documentation they need to show. Use the contact information on the food map to call ahead to find out what your site requires. Many grab and go sites are also offering flexibility regarding pick up of meals.

If there is no one who can pick food up for you (whether or not you have the means to purchase food), there are some community groups and pantries supporting home delivery of food. Call 2-1-1 (or visit <http://pa211sw.org>) or contact the Food Bank (www.pittsburghfoodbank.org) to find out what options are available.

Senior-Specific Services

Is the Area Agency on Aging Home Delivered Meals (HDM) program still operating?

Yes, the HDM program is fully operational and new referrals for HDM are being taken through Allegheny County Department of Human Services Area Agency on Aging SeniorLine at 412-350-5460. Currently, the Home delivered Meal program is delivering frozen meals. Delivery days of those meals varies based on Provider.

Are the Senior Centers still providing meals?

Yes, all senior centers are making “grab and go” meals available to regular center senior meal participants that are in need. Contact your center to find what their pick-up process is. If you are not registered at a senior center and over 60, call the Allegheny County Department of Human Services Area Agency on Aging SeniorLine at 412-350-5460 for information and assistance.

Additional Information

What other supports are available?

The Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security (CARES) Act recently signed into law included the creation of a Pandemic Unemployment Assistance (PUA) benefit. Eligibility information for the PUA can be found here. A listing of unemployment rights and resources for Pennsylvania can be found at <https://www.attorneygeneral.gov/covid-rights>.

Additional Resources:

This FAQ was compiled by the Allegheny County Department of Human Services for our clients, staff and providers, but the content is relevant for all county residents. While DHS and its partners support many county residents in accessing food from the senior feeding programs, DHS does not directly oversee the food programs described above.

There are several key partners working on food access. Please visit their websites for more information:

- **The Greater Pittsburgh Food Bank**
 - [COVID-19 Information Covid-19 FAQ](#)
- **Just Harvest**
 - <https://www.justharvest.org/>
- **The United Way of Southwestern PA**
 - <https://uwsdpa.org/>
 - <http://pa211sw.org/>

[note: these organizations serve Allegheny County and the broader southwestern PA region]

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