

Definition COVID-19-Related Absence for Purposes of Issuing P-EBT Benefits

For the purposes of issuing P-EBT benefits, Vermont schools need to track excused COVID-related absences in SY22-23. It is important to track these absences accurately, as households may receive P-EBT funds based on this information. For the purposes of P-EBT, COVID-19-related absences are any excused absence that is a result of concerns about the spread of COVID-19. These could include absences or class-room closures initiated by the school or by the household for any of the following reasons:

- Absence due to COVID-19-like symptoms, with or without a positive test.
- Absence due to any quarantine or isolation requirements or recommendations as issued by the CDC or the Vermont Department of Health. These include positive test, symptoms, or close-contact status of the student or others in their household.
- Absence due to any need to quarantine before/after travel or to protect vulnerable household or family members.
- Absence to receive COVID-19 vaccination or as a result of symptoms related to COVID-19 vaccinations.
- Absence due to transportation barriers resulting from a COVID-19-related reason.
- Students who cannot attend school because paraeducators or other support staff assigned to that student are not available for a COVID-19-related reason.
- Medically vulnerable students needing to reduce risks of exposure to COVID-19.
- Students who are not physically at school for any of the above reasons but are engaged in school through remote learning conducted by school staff or contracted staff.
 - See questions 17-19 of USDA's P-EBT Q&A – SY 2021-22 for more on eligibility of students engaged in virtual learning.
- While contact tracing is not a tool that the state is currently relying on for COVID-19 prevention, absence due to need to complete contact tracing would also be considered COVID-19-related.

The above list is not exhaustive. School COVID coordinators or P-EBT officials may make determinations about other COVID-19-related absences. In making these determinations, consider whether the student would have attended school if not concerns about the spread of COVID-19. School policies dictate what constitutes an excused absence. Per USDA guidance, unexcused absences do not qualify the student for P-EBT benefits, even if they were COVID-19-related.

For the purposes of P-EBT, school building closures for the above reasons will also make students eligible for P-EBT benefits. However, to reduce errors in regular attendance data reporting to the AOE, building closures should not be tracked using an attendance code, and should instead be separately compiled and added to P-EBT reporting.