



**United States
Department of
Agriculture**

Food and
Nutrition
Service

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SUBJECT: Automatic Eligibility for Early Head Start Participants

TO: State Agencies
 Child Nutrition Programs
 All States

 Regional Directors
 Special Nutrition Programs
 All Regions

This memorandum supplements the guidance issued on May 16, 2008, concerning automatic eligibility for free meals for any child who is enrolled in Head Start. We are issuing this to provide information about free meal benefits for participants in Early Head Start.

Early Head Start is a federally-funded child development program that provides services to low-income infants, toddlers, and pregnant women. It has the same eligibility criteria as Head Start. Therefore, the amendments to the Richard B. Russell National School Lunch Act that make any child enrolled in Head Start automatically eligible for free meals also apply to participants in Early Head Start.

In addition to children who are enrolled in Head Start, the law establishes free meal eligibility for infants and toddlers, and, in some instances, pregnant women, who receive Early Head Start services. To establish automatic eligibility, prospective mothers must be enrolled in Early Head Start and be eligible to receive school meals through the National School Lunch and School Breakfast Programs, or another child nutrition program.

Participants in Early Head Start may receive free meal benefits without further application or eligibility determination. Acceptable documentation for participants includes an approved Early Head Start application, a statement of Early Head Start enrollment, or a list of participants from an Early Head Start official. All reimbursable meals served to participants in Early Head Start may be claimed at the free rate.

Automatic Eligibility for Early Head Start Participants
Page 2

We recognize that this extension of automatic eligibility may have limited applicability, but it is important to assure that enrolled children in Early Head Start, including eligible prospective mothers, are able to participate. Please work with Early Head Start and other institutions and local education agencies in your States to implement these amendments. State agencies should direct any questions concerning this guidance to their Regional offices.

Original Signed

CYNTHIA LONG
Director
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