

State health officials continue Harvey food assistance program

Advocacy groups ask for more time, better locations

By Robert Downen

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State health department officials will give Harris County residents who need food assistance after Hurricane Harvey three more days to register, but advocacy groups still want more time and more convenient locations.

Those seeking financial assistance under the Disaster Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program — also known as D-SNAP — will be able to register from Wednesday through Friday at the Alexander Deussen Park's Senior Center and Open Air Pavilion at 12303 Sonnier St.



*Thousands wait to apply for food assistance at the George R. Brown Convention Center on Oct. 6. More than 932,000 Harris County residents have received help.
Photo: John Shapley*

The single site will be open from 8 a.m. to 7 p.m. Applicants must be in line by 7 p.m., the Texas Department of Health and Human Services announced Monday in a press release, though the agency warned that "due to high volumes of applicants, not all individuals in line at 7 p.m. will necessarily be served."

The announcement comes more than a week after the program ended Oct. 6. D-SNAP provides qualifying families with cards that can be used to purchase food and drinks but not alcohol or tobacco.

Advocacy groups had previously called on state lawmakers and HHS to extend the program for at least two weeks, citing the experiences of many residents who

said they waited for in line for hours at various registration sites in Harris County only to be turned away.

The Metropolitan Organization previously requested a longer extension of the program and said its various church and nonprofit organizations would not be able to fulfill the needs of the thousands they said could miss out on D-SNAP benefits if the program is not extended.

In a statement Monday, TMO said it was pleased by news of the three-day extension but also said the new location might not be accessible to many people. TMO said it would call Tuesday for more locations throughout the county.

More than 932,000 people have been served at such sites in Harris County, HHS said Monday. The agency also noted that the state will have offered D-SNAP for 18 days when the program closes Friday. Normally, the agency said, the program is offered for up to seven days.

Those who qualify for the program receive benefits on a Lone Star Card, which is normally used to provide food stamps under the Texas' regular SNAP program. To qualify for D-SNAP benefits, a family must live in a county declared a federal disaster area, have experienced loss of income or home and not receive regular SNAP food benefits.

Families then receive amounts equal to two months of the maximum SNAP benefits for their household size, which range from \$192 a month for one person to \$760 for a family of five, plus \$144 for each additional person.

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