

## **How do I Apply for Benefits at the Department of Social Services during the COVID-19 health emergency?**

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**If you would like assistance, Neighborhood Legal Services is here to help you. Call 1-888-869-6576.**

**I need to apply for Public Assistance. Do I have to go to DSS in person to apply for Temporary Assistance and SNAP during the COVID-19 health emergency?**

**No.** At this time, you do **NOT** have to go in person to DSS to apply for Temporary Assistance and/or SNAP benefits. DSS is encouraging applicants to use remote services if possible, but you can go in person if you want. No matter which action you chose, your case will still open at the same time. No method is quicker than the other.

**What happens if I cannot apply remotely because I do not have a computer? Can DSS stop me from coming in or deny my application until I can get a computer?**

**No.** You have the right to meet with a worker face-to-face if you want. If you want to apply in person at DSS, go to the Rath Building. DSS is required to meet with you and take your application on the day you apply.

**Do I ever have to go to DSS in person to apply for benefits during the health emergency?**

**Yes.** You must still go to DSS in-person at 158 Pearl Street in Buffalo if you are:

- Experiencing Homelessness,
- Have an immediate lack of food, or
- Have your utilities shut off.

**If I do not go to DSS, how do I apply for benefits? Where can I get an Application?**

1. You can get the application by going on-line. To get an application for these benefits, click on the links below.

- **Temporary Assistance:** <http://otda.ny.gov/programs/applications/2921.pdf>
- **SNAP:** <https://www2.erie.gov/snap/index.php?q=forms>
- **Day Care:** <https://www2.erie.gov/socialservices/index.php?q=daycare>
- **Emergency Services:** <https://www2.erie.gov/temporaryassistance/index.php?q=common-documents-needed-emergency-services-applications>

- Applications for Emergency Assistance may be (1) faxed to 716-858-2628, (2) mailed to Erie County Department of Social Services, Unit FA6/75000, P.O. Box 120, Buffalo, NY 14201-0120, or (3) dropped off at 460 Main Street, 1<sup>st</sup> floor. Please provide a reliable phone number on your application. DSS will attempt to contact you the same day for an interview.
2. You can go on-line and request an application be mailed to you.
    - TA: <https://www2.erie.gov/temporaryassistance/application-request-form>
  3. You can request an application by phone by calling (716) 858-8000.
  4. You can drop off completed applications in drop boxes.

Completed applications for Temporary Assistance, SNAP and Medicaid should be dropped off with any supporting documents you have at **158 Pearl St., Buffalo, NY**

Completed applications for Child Support, Day Care Families, and Day Care Providers, should be dropped off at **95 Franklin St. \*DSS will soon have a drop box at 460 Main St. Second Floor, Buffalo New York, but does not have one yet.**

5. You can mail your application and supporting documentation to: **ECDSS, PO Box 120, Buffalo, NY 14201-9903.** While DSS prefers this method of applying, you should decide which of these options works best for you. The method of application will not affect the amount or the timing of your benefits.

**I was supposed to recertify during the health emergency. Should I go down to DSS to meet with my worker?**

**No.** Interviews are being done by phone instead of meeting face-to-face with a worker.

**Advocacy Tip:** Make sure to include a working phone number with any application you give to DSS so that they can contact you for an interview. You can give a friend's phone number if that is best for you. Your application could be delayed or even denied if DSS cannot contact you with the telephone number you gave them with your application.

**Does it matter which way I apply? Will it be faster if I go down and get my benefits in person?**

**No.** DSS must open your case in a certain amount of time. It does not matter if you meet in person, mail or go on-line. DSS has up to 30 days to process your application for Family Assistance and cannot open a Safety Net case before 45 days. DSS has 30 days to open a SNAP case and five (5) calendar days to open an expedited SNAP case.

Recertification deadlines have been extended or moved back 90 days for people who are already receiving Temporary Assistance and SNAP. If you were supposed to recertify in April, May or June 2020, you are now going to recertify in July, August or September 2020. You will not lose any benefits.

## **How do I apply for Medicaid?**

That depends on a few things, including your household composition, age, citizenship status and income. If you are getting SSI or Temporary Assistance, you should apply for Medicaid at ECDSS.

If you are not getting Temporary Assistance or SSI, you should apply for Medicaid through the NYSOH. If you want to apply for Medicaid, please contact our office at (716) 847-0650. We have certified navigators who can help you get Medicaid within the next three (3) days.

## **What should I do if DSS won't take my application or if DSS denies my case?**

Call Neighborhood Legal Services immediately at **(716) 847-0650** and ask to speak to an advocate in the Health & Economic Security Unit. We will review your notice with you and we may agree to take your case.