

The shutdown brought people who rely on SNAP an extra helping of economic hardship

March 6 2019, by Orgul Demet Ozturk, Chad Cotti And John Gordanier



Credit: Matthias Zomer from Pexels

Millions of the poorest Americans are probably feeling the aftershocks of the partial government shutdown weeks after it ended.

One big reason for that is how it disrupted the flow of Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program benefits. Florida, [Ohio](#), [Virginia](#) and many other states are [adjusting their monthly disbursements](#) to avoid making

SNAP recipients go [50 days or more](#) without any assistance. But the distribution schedule will be altered in many cases through mid-April.

We are [health economists](#) who [have studied](#) how public policies affect [low-income people](#). We have found that the timing of when benefits through the program, commonly referred to as SNAP or [food stamps](#), are disbursed affects everything from [what and how much people eat](#) and [how well children learn](#) to how likely they are to visit the [emergency room](#).

Disrupted scheduling

More than [40 million Americans](#) get benefits from SNAP, the nation's largest program designed to alleviate hunger. All households receiving SNAP benefits get them only once a month through [Electronic Benefit Transfer cards](#), which work like debit cards. The actual date varies in part because the states have [flexibility](#) in how they administer this federally funded program managed by the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

Out of concern that the [government shutdown](#) might jeopardize funding, the USDA told the states to distribute benefits that were slated for February [in January](#). This change occurred even though the shutdown ended in January and we are seeing ample evidence that it [disrupted SNAP distribution schedules](#).

Maximum amount of monthly SNAP benefits

The U.S. government allocates the nutritional benefits formerly known as food stamps to households according to how many eligible members there are in a given family.



Credit: Chart: The Conversation, CC-BY-ND Source: USDA Food and Nutrition Service

Fewer calories

Most SNAP households [spend their benefits soon](#) after their disbursement, making it a struggle to keep food on the table before the next time their benefits arrive. Brown University economist [Jesse M. Shapiro](#) observed a 10 to 15 percent decline in caloric consumption between the first and last week of the [benefit](#) month.

Having less to eat appears to take a toll on the academic performance of many children. When we assessed [low-income students' test scores](#), we found significant declines in performance in the final week before their families received their SNAP benefits – when those children were more likely to eat less. [Other researchers](#) have reached similar conclusions.

Additional research has shown that school children have more [behavioral problems](#) and discipline issues at the end of the period between SNAP benefit disbursements.

The timing of when food stamp benefits are dispatched may also have something to do with an increase in trips to the emergency room. Emergency room visits by people who get benefits but have not gotten any for nearly a month are more likely caused by [asthma](#), [anemia](#), [diabetes](#) or [hypocalcemia](#) – a condition caused by a very low level of blood sugar.

We believe that this happens partly because of people spending some of their own money on food – instead of insulin, inhalers and other medications. Even without schedule changes, we believe that SNAP benefits are too low, leading to rationing and other hard choices when they run out after a few weeks. For the Americans who rely on them, the disruption due to the shutdown only made this problem worse.

This article is republished from [The Conversation](#) under a Creative Commons license. Read the [original article](#).

Provided by The Conversation

Citation: The shutdown brought people who rely on SNAP an extra helping of economic hardship (2019, March 6) retrieved 6 May 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2019-03-shutdown-brought-people-snap-extra.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.