

FIRST FORUM

Your Source for Financial Solutions

What Do I Need to Know About the Advance Child Tax Credit Payments?

The advance Child Tax Credits of 2021 will be distributed monthly to eligible families, beginning July 15. We're answering some common questions about these payments.

What are the changes to the Child Tax Credits for 2021?

The Child Tax Credit (CTC) for 2021 will be greatly expanded:

- Eligible families will get \$3,000 per qualifying child between ages 6 and 17 by the end of 2021.
- Eligible families will get \$3,600 per qualifying child under age 6 by the end of 2021.
- The credit is fully refundable.
- Advance payments of up to 50% of the total CTC per family will be distributed once a month, from July 15 through December 15, 2021.

Who's eligible for the Child Tax Credits?

Taxpayers who have a primary residence in the U.S. and live there at least half of the year are eligible for the Child Tax Credits.

Payments will begin to be phased out for married taxpayers filing a joint return who earn more than \$150,000 a year, for heads of household earning more than \$112,500 a year and for all other taxpayers earning more than \$75,000 a year. Income eligibility will be based on 2020's tax return.

How much will I receive per month through the advance Child Tax Credits?

The advance payments being sent to qualifying families will be equal to up to 50% of each family's total CTC. The payments will be based upon the income information found in taxpayers' 2020 tax returns, or, if these are not yet filed, in the 2019 tax returns.

Families eligible for the full CTC will receive half of the total across a six-month time span. From July to December, eligible families will receive \$300 a month per child under age 6, and \$250 a month per child age 6-17.

Can I decline the advance payments of the 2021 Child Tax Credits?

Eligible taxpayers who do not want advance payments of the 2021 Child Tax Credit can choose not to receive them. This may apply to taxpayers who anticipate earning more in 2021 than in 2020, or who have primary custody

of the child(ren) receiving the credit in 2020, but not in 2021. The IRS has provided instructions for how to decline the advance payments on their website: irs.gov/credits-deductions/child-tax-credit-update-portal.

How will the Child Tax Credit be credited to my account?

CTC payments will be credited to the account you have on file with the IRS on the effective date provided by the IRS. If you find you need to provide the IRS with new account information or want to verify the information they have, you can find your routing and account numbers for MembersFirst in the mobile app. Just log in, select the savings or checking account you wish to receive the deposit and tap the "i" for your account information.

The advance CTC payments will be a benefit for families struggling with the financial fallout of the pandemic, but it may not be in every taxpayer's best interest to accept these payments now. Use this information to brush up on the details of these payments so you can make an informed decision.



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THE PROMISES AND THE PERILS OF BUY NOW, PAY LATER

Gotta have it now, but don't have the cash? Why not buy now, and pay later [BNPL]? It's the perfect way for you to walk away with that overpriced exercise bike even if your wallet is practically empty, right?

Maybe. Or maybe not.

Let's take a look at these programs, how they work and what to be aware of before you sign up.

How BNPL works

You'll find a BNPL button when checking out at most online retailers. This option will usually link you to a BNPL app, such as Afterpay, Affirm or Quadpay. A brick-and-mortar store may offer you this option at checkout as well. Here, too, you'll pay through an affiliated app.

If you choose to go with a BNPL option, you'll need to get approved. Apps will usually run just a soft credit check to confirm your information. Once approved, you can choose to link your debit card, checking account or credit card so the app can collect the payments when they're due. Next, you'll generally make a 25% deposit on the purchase, and the item is yours! Most BNPL plans require you to pay off the rest in three fixed installments, but payment schedules can vary.

When to choose BNPL

BNPL programs can be a good choice for items you urgently need, but can't afford right now, like medical equipment that's not covered by insurance. It can also be ideal for workers with an uneven income flow who may experience lean times of the year but know that better cash flow is ahead.

Why BNPL can be a bad idea

- **It encourages overspending.** It's easy to think that, if you'll only be paying a small part of the price today, why not buy it now instead of financing the full amount?
- **Missed payments are penalized.** Some services slap an interest charge on your outstanding balance, with rates as high as 40%. Other programs will charge a one-time late fee, which can be as high as \$39. Others will tack on an extra fixed fee to all subsequent payments.
- **It can wreak havoc on responsible financial habits.** If a consumer has purchased multiple items through BNPL programs, the monthly payments won't be so minimal. The payments will need to be factored into a budget and can eat into other categories, like savings.

BNPL programs can be super convenient, but they also present risks. Our best advice? Use with caution.

WHAT'S YOUR BEST POST-PANDEMIC MORTGAGE STRATEGY?

Like many consumers, some members have recently inquired as to their best mortgage strategy in what are very interesting financial and real estate marketplaces. Here are three recommendations for navigating some of the challenges in today's environment.

1. With higher rates, have I missed the opportunity to refinance?

While it is true that rates have increased slightly from the all-time lows we saw at the beginning of the year, they are still quite attractive. The media tends to report changes in interest rates after the fact. The financial markets are very fluid and, in reality, rates change daily. The truth is that rates increased a couple of months ago but, if you were to check today, you might be pleasantly surprised to learn that they've recovered nicely.

Recommendation: Request a free, no-obligation consultation with one of our Licensed Mortgage Advisors. He or she can assess your specific situation and make suggestions to help you meet your financial goals related to real estate.

2. With increasing home prices, is real estate still a good investment?

Historically, obtaining the mortgage has been the most stressful aspect of purchasing a home. Now, finding the home and negotiating a contract to purchase is perhaps the most stressful step in the process! That being said, home prices are increasing rapidly because there simply is not enough supply to meet the demand. Before COVID-19, some believe the inventory shortage was already beginning to impact the marketplace as Millennials were finally embracing homeownership. COVID-19 caused many of us to re-evaluate if our homes best suited our needs, especially since we were

spending so much more time at home. This fueled a strong demand, despite the pandemic, for real estate. Coupled with pent-up demand and the increased cost of construction, the supply of existing housing inventory is at an all-time low, and prices are at an all-time high. Most experts are of the opinion that as the cost of construction settles down, the strong demand should buoy real estate inventory.

Recommendation: Partner with a knowledgeable REALTOR® acting as a buyer's agent to navigate the marketplace. The purpose of a buyer's agent is to represent your fiduciary interest in the transaction, not the seller's. The buyer's agent commission is paid by the seller, not the buyer.

3. What should I be aware of if I want to buy in this market?

Sellers are receiving multiple offers within days of listing properties for sale. In this competitive environment, it is critically important to know your mortgage strategy prior to looking at homes. If you plan to buy a house, you will likely have to make a very good offer with very little time to think things over. Sellers are generally not willing to accept offers with complicated financing contingencies. We have heard stories of buyers offering to pay above asking price only to find out that their agreed-upon price exceeds the appraised value.

Recommendation: Have a conversation with your Licensed Mortgage Advisor and know what your mortgage capabilities are prior to looking for a home. Ask for a pre-approval and make certain that you ask any questions related to the mortgage process before you start looking at homes. This will make you a stronger, more qualified buyer, and most importantly, it will enable you to focus on finding and negotiating to buy the right house.

When you're ready to start the purchase or refinance process, give us a call at (800) 503-6855 or visit CUFS.org. We'll be happy to answer all your questions and make the pre-approval and purchase process simple and convenient.

Vacation Loan

The vacation loan is still here through July 31, 2021! Borrow up to \$5,000 at 8.9% APR* with terms up to 24 months. Finish out your summer strong with the trip of a lifetime, a staycation, or finally tackle a project in your home.

Apply at membersfirstga.com or via your mobile app.

*APR=Annual Percentage Rate. Promotion ends July 31, 2021. Qualifications are based on an assessment of individual creditworthiness and our underwriting standards. All loans are subject to credit approval. Program, terms and conditions are subject to change without notice. Visit membersfirstga.com/offers for full details.

E-STATEMENTS

Don't forget! Sign up for easy, convenient e-Statements today! They're fee-free and just a tap away! Sign up through online banking, stop by or give us a call.

Make the switch today!

Beware the USPS Smishing Text Scam

Your phone pings, alerting you to a new text. You swipe to find a message from the USPS. It tells you the scheduled delivery for your package has been changed and they want you to click on a link to confirm. Just one click, and it'll be done.

Stop! Don't click that link! If you receive a text like this, you are likely looking at a scam. Here's what you need to know about the USPS smishing text scam.

How the scam plays out

The United States Postal Inspection Service (USPIS) is warning of an uptick in smishing scams that use the USPS as a cover. If the victim clicks on a link in a message like the one described above, they'll be downloading malware, giving the scammer access to their device and personal info.

Stay ahead of this scam by knowing this simple fact: The USPS never sends unsolicited text messages about deliveries. You'll only get a message from them if you've signed up for alerts about a package's delivery. If you haven't, and you still receive a message about a scheduled delivery change, you're looking at a scam.

What to do if you're targeted

- Confirm the identity of the sender by checking with the USPS if you actually have a delivery schedule change.
- Don't reply or click on links.

- Save a screenshot of the text to share with law enforcement agencies and delete the message.
- Block the number and update the security on your device.
- As always, don't share sensitive information, such as your Social Security number or account details, with an unverified contact.

Report the scam

Do your part to stop the scammers by reporting it to the proper authorities.

Email a screenshot of the text to spam@uspis.gov. Make sure your screenshot shows the number of the sender as well as the date it was sent. You'll also need to include your name in the email so the team can reach you if necessary, along with any other relevant details about the scam.

You can also report the scam to [FTC.gov](https://www.ftc.gov).

**Protect your information...
stay alert and stay safe!**



ATTENTION, PREVIOUS CHATHAM FEDERAL CREDIT UNION MEMBERS:

You may have seen several notices over the past year announcing the retirement and replacement of the routing and transit number, 261271982, previously used by Chatham FCU members. However, with the IRS/Treasury posting of COVID relief payments based on tax return information, MFCU has decided to delay this date until further notice, which we feel is in the best interest of our members. A new date will be chosen soon, and new notifications will be shared so you can continue to make preparations for this change.

Please visit membersfirstga.com/blog/cfcurn for important information regarding the steps you should take, including ordering new checks at no cost to you, and to learn how to avoid interruption in payments and deposits.

Go to membersfirstga.com/blog/cfcurn for more information.

Microsoft® has announced the end of their support for Internet Explorer® 11.

Effective August 17, 2021, please use Safari, Chrome or Edge browsers to access MembersFirst Online Banking on your desktop, phone or tablet. Access through Internet Explorer will no longer be available.

CU HAPPENINGS!



We're working hard to give back to our friends and communities. Check out these CU Happenings – happening all around us!

Pooler Food Truck and Market Place Community

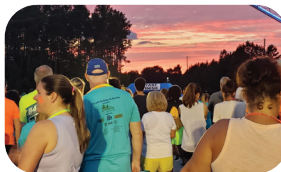
A little rain won't dampen our spirit! We still had a great time supporting our local community and informing attendees about our beautiful new Pooler location and our great Credit Union benefits.

Piedmont Henry Healthcare Week

We were so glad to celebrate members and friends during Piedmont's Healthcare Week! Piedmont Henry Administration and the Human Resources team put together a fantastic Tailgate Party as a thank you to their staff for all their hard work. Shane's Rib Shack catered both their day and night shifts, and MembersFirst was there to say thank you as well!

Run with the Badges 5K Glow Run

Paulding Public Safety Appreciation held their 8th Annual Run with the Badges 5K Glow Run on June 4, 2021. What a fun and special event to sponsor and participate in! It's been so nice seeing each of our community members in person and raising funds for another worthy cause!



HOLIDAY CLOSINGS

Labor Day

Monday, September 6, 2021

Columbus Day

Monday, October 11, 2021



Locations and Contact Information

Call Center

METRO ATLANTA

Phone (404) 978-0080

Fax (404) 978-0095

COASTAL GEORGIA

Phone (912) 352-2902

Fax (912) 352-0838

Branch Locations

Visit a branch near you.

Atlanta, Austell, Decatur, Douglasville, Fayetteville, Hiram, Marietta, Newnan, Pooler, Sandy Springs and Savannah.

Main Office

2476 Lawrenceville Hwy.

Decatur, GA 30033-3226

Mortgages

(404) 978-0080

Mailing Address

PO Box 33189

Decatur, GA 30033-0189

Phone Banking

Metro Atlanta

(404) 978-0089

Coastal Georgia

(912) 352-0059

24-Hour Lending Service

membersfirstga.com

Website

membersfirstga.com

This credit union is federally insured by the National Credit Union Administration.



Download our free Mobile Banking App from Google Play™ or the Apple® App Store. Just search 'membersfirstga'.

Important Information Regarding the Visa DEBIT ScoreCard Rewards Program

Just a reminder, the ScoreCard Rewards program for Visa **Debit** Cardholders ended June 30. As of June 30, you no longer earn points on purchases made with your Visa Debit Card. Points earned through June 30 may be redeemed by August 31, 2021. MembersFirst Visa Credit Cardholders can keep and continue earning Rewards Points by transferring their debit card points to their credit card. Just call (404) 978-0080 or (912) 352-2902 to request the transfer.

Not currently a MembersFirst Visa Credit Cardholder?

Apply by July 31, 2021, and, upon approval, not only can you transfer your debit card points, you can also transfer higher rate credit card balances and make purchases through July 31 at just 1.99% APR* for 12 months! With no balance transfer fees, annual fee or default interest rate, your savings extend beyond the promotion period!

Apply at membersfirstga.com to transfer and save today!

*APR=Annual Percentage Rate. Promotion ends July 31, 2021. Qualifications are based on an assessment of individual creditworthiness and our underwriting standards. All loans are subject to credit approval. Program, terms and conditions are subject to change without notice. Non-cardholders interested in applying should visit membersfirstga.com/offers for full details.



CU SUCCEED SCHOLARSHIP DRAWING

The CU Succeed Scholarship drawing will be held on Friday, August 27, 2021. Please turn in all report cards and transcripts to your local branch by Wednesday, August 25.

For more on this scholarship made available through the CU Succeed program, visit membersfirstga.com.

Learn more at membersfirstga.com.