

FAQ re Unemployment and COVID-19
Last updated March 27, 2020

Who is eligible for unemployment benefits related to COVID-19?

In addition to existing earnings and work requirements that remain unchanged, employees may be eligible if they fall into one of three categories: (1) they were temporarily laid off as a result of the state of emergency, as long as they remain able and available to work and maintain contact with their employer; (2) they are under a temporary medical quarantine or isolation restriction relating to COVID-19 and expect to return to work; (3) they are on a temporary unpaid leave of absence due to a medical quarantine or isolation restriction, a demonstrated risk of exposure or infection, or a need to care for a dependent family member as a result of COVID-19. These eligibility criteria exist for the duration of the emergency, plus 30 days after the end of the state of emergency.

What if I quit due to fear of exposure? Could I qualify?

Possibly. Employees who quit voluntarily may be able to qualify for unemployment benefits if they are considered to have “good cause” for quitting and they remain able and available to work.

I’m on sick leave relating to COVID-19, do I qualify for unemployment?

You would not qualify while you are receiving wages, including accrued sick leave or vacation.

Can I receive Income Protection and unemployment at the same time?

No. To qualify for unemployment, you must be available to work; to qualify for IP, you must be unable to work.

Do I have to exhaust my sick or vacation leave to qualify?

This is at the option of the employer. Your employer can require you to exhaust your sick or vacation leave prior to going on an unpaid leave or layoff status.

I’m on an unpaid leave but my employer is still paying my health insurance – would that affect my eligibility?

No. Unemployment considers whether you are still receiving wages but not benefits.

If I get unemployment, do I have to look for other work?

No. Work search requirements have been suspended for the duration of the state of emergency. You do still have to make a weekly claim, however.

I’m a part-time employee, am I eligible for unemployment?

Yes, part-time employees can be eligible.

I wasn’t laid off but my hours were cut, am I eligible for unemployment?

You may be eligible for a partial benefit based on a reduction in hours.

What benefits are there under the new federal law that just passed?

That law approved a series of changes to unemployment benefits, including extending benefits for an additional 13 weeks (for a total maximum benefit of 39 weeks in Maine), creating an additional form of assistance for individuals who are self-employed or otherwise would not qualify for unemployment traditionally (including gig workers, for instance) and increased the unemployment benefit by \$600 a week across the board for four months.

How do I qualify under the new federal programs?

These programs will be administered by the State and use the same eligibility criteria, with some additional bases for individuals who are self-employed, gig workers or may have exhausted their unemployment benefits already, among others. There is a lengthy list of COVID-19 related circumstances that may make an individual eligible, including being required to quarantine or care for a family or household member who is, being unable to work due to the need to care for children whose schools or childcare facilities closed due to COVID-19 or being unable to work because the employer's premises are closed due to COVID-19. Many of these bases may be subject to some interpretation – if your job has been affected and you are no longer being paid (or being paid less) as a result of the public health emergency, we encourage you to apply.

I got laid off before the bill passed, does that matter?

If your separation was directly related to COVID-19, you may still be eligible, as the law applies retroactively to January 27, 2020.

For more information, please visit the [MaineDOL unemployment site](#).