

Frequently Asked Questions Regarding Unemployment Compensation

SEIU Healthcare Pennsylvania

Pennsylvania unemployment compensation provides temporary income to workers who have lost their job or have had their hours of work reduced through no fault of their own. If they are eligible, then they will receive income to help meet their expenses.

Governor Wolf, along with the federal government, have:

- made it easier for workers to apply for and receive unemployment compensation benefits;
- extended the length of benefits to a total of thirty-nine weeks;
- expanded who can be eligible for benefits to include the self-employed, independent contractors, gig workers, and workers with limited work histories; and
- increased the amount of unemployment compensation benefits.

While everyone's situation is a little bit different, here are frequently asked questions and answers about COVID-19 and unemployment compensation.

Q: Am I eligible for unemployment compensation benefits if I am out of work because my Employer closed (either temporarily or permanently) because of COVID-19?

A: Yes, you should be eligible. The fastest and easiest way is to file an initial claim application online.

Q: Am I eligible for unemployment compensation benefits if I am quarantined due to COVID-19?

A: Yes, you should be eligible if you have been directed by a healthcare provider, medical professional, or public official to self-isolate or quarantine.

Q: Am I eligible for unemployment compensation benefits if I was told by my Employer to stay at home because of COVID-19?

A: Yes, you should be eligible.

Q: Am I eligible for unemployment compensation benefits if I am still working but working fewer hours because of COVID-19?

A: Yes, you should be eligible for partial unemployment compensation benefits for any week that you are not working or are working reduced hours and receiving less pay.

Q: Am I eligible for unemployment compensation benefits if I am temporarily not working because my Employer has no work for me right now but I expect to be working my hours again once COVID-19 passes?

A: Yes, you should be eligible.

Q: Do I have to use up any of my accrued vacation or paid time off before I can apply for unemployment compensation benefits?

A: No. You are not required to exhaust your accrued vacation, paid time off, or benefit time before you can file a claim application for unemployment compensation. The Commonwealth of Pennsylvania determines your eligibility for unemployment compensation benefits, not your Employer.

Q: I am a part-time worker. Am I eligible for unemployment compensation benefits if I have to self-isolate or quarantine or am unable to work because I tested positive for COVID-19?

A: Yes, you should be eligible for unemployment compensation benefits.

Q: I am a part-time worker, but regularly volunteer for extra shifts. Will my unemployment compensation benefit amount be based on my classification or the hours that I actually work?

A: Your unemployment compensation benefit amount will be based on your actual earnings during your base year. Your Notice of Financial Determination will outline how your benefit amount is calculated.

Q: Am I eligible for unemployment compensation benefits if my Employer offers me the ability to work from home?

A: No, if your Employer offers you telework and you are able to perform that work, then you are not eligible for unemployment compensation benefits if you refuse that work. However, if the telework your Employer offers results in a reduction of hours, then you should be eligible for unemployment compensation benefits.

Q: If my Employer offers me a new work assignment that I am qualified to do because my current assignment has been eliminated or reduced, can I refuse that new work assignment and be eligible for unemployment compensation benefits?

A: No, if your Employer offers you another work assignment that you are qualified, able, and available for, and you refuse it, then you would not be eligible for unemployment compensation benefits.

However, if the new work assignment is on a different shift, and you are unable to work that different shift, then you could be eligible for unemployment compensation benefits and should file an initial claim application online.

Q: Can I access unemployment compensation benefits if my child's school has been closed and I must stay home with my child?

A: Probably. Previously, unemployment compensation benefits were only paid to workers whose Employer had either temporarily or permanently closed their business or reduced hours. In March the government passed the C.A.R.E. Act, which includes unemployment compensation benefits for workers that usually do not qualify for unemployment compensation benefits. This includes:

- a person that is the primary caregiver of a child,
- the child's school has closed due to COVID-19, and
- the school's closure makes the worker unable and unavailable to work.

Q: If the waiting week requirement has been temporarily suspended, on what date will my unemployment compensation benefit claim start?

A: Your Notice of Financial Determination will provide the start date of your unemployment compensation benefits, which should be the first day that you became unemployed or had your hours of work reduced.

Q: I am a homecare worker. Am I eligible for unemployment compensation benefits if my consumer tells me not to provide care? Or, tells me to provide care less often?

A: Yes, you should be eligible if you are not working or are working less and are receiving less pay then you should be eligible for unemployment compensation benefits.

Q: I am a homecare worker. My consumer makes last minute decisions on whether I should go to work to provide care or not work. Should I apply for unemployment compensation benefits for this week even if my hours or work return to the normal amount the following week?

A: Yes, you should be eligible for partial unemployment compensation benefits for any week that you are not working or are working reduced hours and receiving less pay. You should file an initial claim application online.

Q: Am I eligible for unemployment compensation benefits if I am already on a Family Medical Leave?

A: Probably not, because to qualify for unemployment compensation benefits, a worker must be able and available to work.

Q: My Employer has temporarily laid me off of my job. Will I permanently lose my job position if I apply for unemployment compensation benefits?

A: No. Applying for unemployment compensation benefits should not have any impact on your ability to return to work.

Q: Can I qualify for unemployment compensation benefits if I have worked less than eighteen weeks in the past year?

A: Maybe. Previously, it was a requirement to have worked eighteen credit weeks within the past base year to qualify for unemployment compensation benefits. In March of this year, the federal government passed the C.A.R.E. Act, this includes unemployment compensation benefits for workers that usually do not qualify for unemployment compensation benefits from January 27, 2020, through December 31, 2020. This includes those with limited work histories as a result of COVID-19.