

Coronavirus/COVID-19 Update 3/19/20

Questions and Answers about Unemployment Insurance (UI)

You should contact the Department of Unemployment and apply for unemployment insurance (UI) right away if:

- Your employer has shut down because of the coronavirus.
- Your employer has reduced your hours of work (for **any** reason, including the coronavirus).
- Your employer has temporarily laid you off and said you can return when business picks up.
- You have been quarantined by a medical professional or by government order, and your employer has either (1) told you to return after the period of quarantine or (2) has not told you anything.
- You have been told to self-quarantine by your employer, medical professional or government order.
- You have to be home to care for a family or household member who has been quarantined or who is sick.
- You left work because you reasonably believe that you have a risk of exposure or infection and have self-quarantined.
- You have left work because your child's school or child care center has closed.

If you're approved for UI and it's possible that you'll return to your work after the coronavirus pandemic is lessening, **it's important to stay in touch with your employer so that you are meeting the UI requirement to search for work.** Otherwise, if you are out of work due to a shutdown, layoff or slow-down, you need to be looking for work. You can look for work online or by other means.

Work search requirements do not apply if: you or a family or household member has been quarantined, you have self-quarantined, or you are caring for a child whose school or child care center is closed, or whose child care provider is unavailable. You do not need to provide medical documentation.

If you miss a UI deadline and the coronavirus or its effects is the reason you missed the deadline, you will be excused for missing the deadline. **However, it is very important to pay attention to all communications from the Department of Unemployment Assistance to avoid any problems or delays in getting UI.**

How to apply for UI?

You can **file a claim** with the Department of Unemployment Assistance (DUA)'s UI Online at www.mass.gov/lwd/unemployment-insur/claimants. UI Online is available daily from 6:00 a.m. to 10:00 p.m. Applying through UI Online is the fastest way to get UI benefits. UI Online is an English-only system.

If you have **trouble completing** the application online, you can ask for help by filling out this form: <https://www.mass.gov/forms/covid-19-department-of-unemployment-assistance-contact-request>.

For more information and updates about UI and COVID-19, see: <https://www.mass.gov/orgs/department-of-unemployment-assistance>

You can apply by telephone by calling 617-626-6800 or 877-626-6800 outside the 617 area code. There are dedicated phone lines for individuals who speak Spanish and Portuguese.

Other Information on UI:

How much UI will you get?

You will get about one-half of your average weekly wage. The maximum amount of UI is \$823 per week. You can also get \$25 per week for each dependent child up to the amount that is half your UI check.

How long will you get UI?

The maximum number of weeks now is 26 weeks but that depends on your earnings in the year before you apply. The number of weeks may be increased if the economy gets worse.

If you have been **unemployed for a few weeks** and your employer didn't tell you to apply for UI, you can get UI benefits for those weeks. Be sure to note in the UI Online system when you first became unemployed.

If you are **still working but are earning less** than you did, you may be able to collect some UI. Here's an example of how that works: your UI benefit is \$300 weekly. You can earn \$100 weekly without losing any of your UI benefit. Once you earn more than that, your UI benefit decreases with each dollar of earnings.

If you are receiving **paid sick leave**, you cannot get UI. However, you do not need to use up all your **fringe benefits** before collecting UI.

If you are a **non-citizen** with work authorization you can apply for UI. Receiving UI does not count as a public charge. You will have to provide documentation of your immigration status and your work authorization card.

*Prepared as general guidance and not as legal advice by Greater Boston Legal Services and Mass. Law Reform Institute. For additional **resources and information on where to get help** go to www.masslegalhelp.org.*