



United Way
for Southeastern Michigan

Memo

To: Kyle DuBuc, Director of Public Policy & Advocacy
From: Amanda Klein, Policy & Advocacy Specialist
Date: March 19, 2020
Re: COVID19 Unemployment Benefits

Expansion of Unemployment Benefits

Governor Gretchen Whitmer issued an executive order today temporarily expanding unemployment benefit eligibility through April 14 in response to the COVID-19 outbreak.

Under the executive order, unemployment benefits are extended to:

- Workers who have an unanticipated family care responsibility, like child care due to school closures or caring for a loved one who becomes ill
- Workers who are sick, quarantined or are unable to work and who don't have access to paid leave options
- First responders in the public health community who become ill or are quarantined.

Changes to unemployment benefits include:

- Benefits extended from 20 to 26 weeks
- The application eligibility period increased from 14 to 28 days
- Normal in-person registration and work search requirements will be suspended
- Employer or employing units will not be charged for unemployment benefits if their employees become unemployed because of an executive order requiring them to close

How to apply for unemployment benefits:

If you have been laid off it is recommended that you apply for unemployment benefits ASAP. **The easiest and fastest way to apply for benefits is online at Michigan.gov/UIA** or you can call 1-866-500-0017.

You will also need to have a few things readily available when you apply. These include:

- Your Social Security number, Driver License Number or State Identification Number
- The names and addresses of employers you have worked for in the past 18 months along with your quarterly gross earnings and the last date of employment with each employer.
- You also need your employer's federal ID or FEIN number

Work Share Program:

If employers are financially distressed but hope to continue operations by cutting back hours, they are encouraged to use the Unemployment Insurance Agency's Work Share program. This allows employers to maintain staffing levels and operations during declines in regular business activity rather than laying off workers. With the plan eligible employees work a reduced number of hours in a work week and receive a portion of weekly unemployment benefits. Unemployment benefits are based on a percentage of reduced hours and pay. More information about the program can be found at www.michigan.gov/workshare.

Information for Employers

Temporary Leave vs. Termination- Due to the uncertainty regarding congressional action on whether and how furloughed workers will be able to access federal paid sick, family and medical leave resources, employers are strongly urged to place employees on temporary leave and advise the worker that they expect to have work available within 120-days as opposed to termination. There is no additional cost to employers, employees remain eligible for UI benefits through the state, and employees may remain eligible for potential federal assistance.

Steps for employers placing employees on temporary unpaid leave:

- Do not terminate the employee – specify a temporary/indefinite leave with return to work expected that is within 120 days.
- Do not create a contractual obligation to bring the employee back to work – Let the employee know that the situation is fluid and subject to change.
- Provide the employee with a formal Unemployment Compensation Notice. Employers will need to provide their Employer Account Number and Federal Identification Number.
- Communicate to the employee about their rights. Under Governor Whitmer's recent Executive Order, workers are placed on leave, or are unable to work because they are sick, quarantined, immunocompromised, or have an unanticipated family care responsibility, are eligible for unemployment insurance benefits.
- Ensure employers are provided information on how to obtain unemployment insurance benefits
- Get each employee's up-to-date contact information.
- Let employees know if you will be putting updated information on the entity's website or intranet, if applicable.
- Appoint a single, or limited number of individuals who will field questions, and communicate that information to employees.
- Keep a tally of all questions and answers. Periodically share with employees.