

COVID-19 (Coronavirus) and Unemployment Insurance Benefits for Workers

Questions and Answers

Question 1: Can I get unemployment benefits if I am laid off due to issues related to the Coronavirus (COVID-19)?

Answer: Yes. Iowa unemployment benefits (“Benefits”) are available to individuals who are unemployed through no fault of their own. If an employer must shut down operations and no work is available, its employees would be eligible for unemployment benefits if they meet the monetary criteria and the federal weekly eligibility criteria of being able and available to work, and seeking work.

Question 2: If an employer lays off employees due to the loss of production caused by the Coronavirus, will the employees be eligible for unemployment insurance benefits?

Answer: Yes. Benefits are available to any individual who is unemployed through no fault of his/her own. If an employer must lay off employees due to the loss of production caused by the Coronavirus, individuals may be eligible for unemployment benefits if they meet the monetary criteria and the federal weekly eligibility criteria.

Question 3: If an employer temporarily lays off employees due to any loss or lack of work due to COVID-19, will the employees be eligible for unemployment insurance benefits?

Answer: Yes. Iowa law allows for an employee to be on temporary layoff when work is not available.

Question 4: If an asymptomatic employee imposes a self-quarantine because of the COVID-19, will they be eligible for unemployment benefits?

Answer: Maybe, if an employer places the worker on a temporary lay-off, reduced hours, or full lay off. If the employer allowed this individual to telework, they would have to accept, and would not qualify for benefits because they would not be unemployed. Employers can require a worker to continue to work unless the worker qualifies for paid sick leave.

Question 5: Can an employer require a worker to stay home for the COVID-19 incubation period?

Answer: Yes. Your employer can require you to stay at home for 14 days if you have traveled abroad or had contact with someone who visited an affected region. Please contact your employer regarding potential telecommuting, sick leave, paid time off (“PTO”), Family & Medical Leave Act (“FMLA”), Disability and other options they may be offering. If paid time off is not available, you may be eligible for unemployment benefits.

Question 6: If an employer requires a worker to stay home due to traveling abroad or being in contact with someone who visited an affected region, are they eligible for unemployment?

Answer: Yes. Your employer can require you to stay at home for 14 days if you have traveled abroad or had contact with someone who visited an affected region. Please contact your employer regarding potential telecommuting, sick leave, paid time off (“PTO”), Family & Medical Leave Act (“FMLA”), Disability and other options they may be offering. If paid time off is not available, you may be eligible for unemployment benefits.

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Question 7: If an employee is in mandatory quarantine because of suspicion of having the Coronavirus, will they be eligible for unemployment benefits?

Answer: Eligibility will be determined on a case by case situation. If the suspicion of having the Coronavirus is legitimate and the facts show there is a high likelihood of being infected, the worker may be eligible for benefits for the incubation period of the virus. Please contact your employer regarding potential telecommuting, sick leave, PTO, FMLA, Disability and other options they may be offering. If paid time off is not available, you may be eligible for unemployment benefits.

Question 8: If an employee is ill because of COVID-19 and unable to work, will they be eligible for unemployment benefits?

Answer: Yes. Please contact your employer regarding potential telecommuting, sick leave, PTO, FMLA, Disability and other options they may be offering. If paid leave is not available from your employer, you will be eligible for unemployment insurance benefits if you meet all other monetary eligibility requirements.

Question 9: If an employer shuts down the business operations because an employee is sick with the COVID-19, would those other employees be eligible for Benefits?

Answer: Yes, those employees would be eligible for benefits, as long as the employee remains able and available for work if work becomes available.

Question 10: If I am unable to work due to my employer shutting down due to health concerns related to the COVID-19, do I need to complete work searches?

Answer: If you file a claim as a result of COVID-19, you will not be required to search for work. If your status changes with your employer and you do not plan on returning to work, please contact us.

Question 11: What if an employer reduces the hours of work because business has slowed down, would the employees impacted by the reduction of hours be eligible for Benefits?

Answer: Yes. Iowa allows for partial unemployment benefits. Impacted employees would still need to report the wages earned per week when filing for benefits.

Question 12: Is the COVID-19 considered a disaster, and can I receive Disaster Unemployment Assistance if I am not eligible for unemployment insurance benefits?

Answer: A disaster has not been declared by the President for individual assistance. If the president of the United States declares the COVID-19 a national disaster, and if individuals experience a loss of work in Iowa as a result, they may be eligible for unemployment benefits and/or Disaster Unemployment Assistance.

Question 13: What if I contract the COVID-19 while on the job; would I be available for Benefits?

Answer: Please contact your employer regarding potential telecommuting, sick leave, PTO, FMLA, Disability, Worker's Compensation and other options they may be offering. If paid time off is not available, you may be eligible for unemployment benefits.

Question 14: What if I have COVID-19 and have to quit, am I eligible for Benefits?

Answer: You can file for unemployment insurance benefits if you are laid off or separated from your employer and you are not currently working. If you were separated from your employer due to a COVID-19 related reason, you will be eligible for unemployment insurance benefits.

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Question 15: What if I have a fear of work, or doing my job because I fear that I may come into contact with the COVID-19. I don't have an underlying medical condition; I just don't want to work while this is going on. If I leave work or refuse to work would I be eligible for benefits?

Answer: No. If you voluntarily quit, refuse to go to work, or refuse to return to work you are not eligible for unemployment. . Please contact your employer regarding potential telecommuting, sick leave, PTO, FMLA, Disability and other options they may be offering. If you do not qualify for paid leave, you will be required to work and if you quit instead, you will not be eligible for unemployment benefits.

Question 16: What if my dependent, family member or child has school cancellations and I have to stay home and care for them, would I be eligible for unemployment?

Answer: Please contact your employer regarding potential telecommuting. You are most likely eligible for paid leave for two weeks under the Families First Coronavirus Response Act (FFCRA). You must contact your employer to provide the necessary documentation regarding your situation.

Question 17: If I am currently receiving unemployment benefits and am unable to find a job due to companies not hiring because of the COVID-19, am I eligible for an extension?

Answer: The CARES Act has passed which includes legislation that will include additional benefits to those that have exhausted benefits. Please continue to check our website for more information.

Question 18: I was diagnosed with COVID-19, and I was hospitalized and/or quarantined. My employer fired me for not showing up to work or calling them. Am I eligible for benefits under this scenario?

Answer: This scenario would be treated as a separation and would be adjudicated according to Iowa Unemployment Law.

Question 19: I was possibly exposed to COVID-19 and my employer found out and told me not to come to work for 2 weeks. Am I eligible for benefits since my employer won't let me come into work?

Answer: You should work with your employer on what leave may be available during the time they will not let you return to work. If paid time off is not available, you may be eligible for unemployment benefits.

Question 20: I was laid off due to the Coronavirus. I used some vacation time during this layoff; do I need to report this if I file for unemployment?

Answer: Vacation pay is reportable for unemployment insurance purposes. Please contact our customer service center for further instructions.

Question 21: If needed, would RESEA and/or Promise Jobs appointments be able to be conducted via phone call?

Answer: We are working through guidance related to programs and the use of technology for service delivery and will update as soon as that is available.

Question 22: If colleges continue to close or go online only, how will that affect the local office as far as partner staff?

Answer: Discussions with partners and program delivery are underway, further guidance will come out as soon as available.

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Question 23: With colleges considering closing and moving to all online courses. What will happen if Title I partners follow that order and do not come into the centers?

Answer: Discussions with partners and program delivery are underway, further guidance will come out as soon as available.

Question 24: I am a teacher who is on Spring Break. Am I eligible for unemployment benefits?

Answer: No, not during a scheduled break due if you have a signed contract and due to reasonable assurance rules. If you are still filing for benefits due to work not being available after spring break, you will be eligible for benefits only if you are not receiving a paycheck from your employer. However, if your employer recalls you, you must be able to return to work. If you are not able to return to work upon recall your eligibility for benefits could be questioned.

Question 25: I am a teacher who is off of work due to COVID-19, not a scheduled break. Am I eligible for unemployment insurance benefits during the time my school is closed?

Answer: Will you continue to be paid from the school? If the school is going to continue paying you then you would need to report your weekly earnings during this time. If the school district will not be paying you then yes, you could be potentially eligible for benefits. However, if your employer recalls you to work, you must be able to return. Otherwise your eligibility could be questioned.

Question 26: I am a teacher's aide/ para educator and my school is closed. I will not be paid for the time my school is closed. Am I eligible for unemployment insurance benefits?

Answer: If you are on a scheduled school break such as Spring Break week, you will not be eligible for that week. If you are not on a scheduled break then you would be eligible for benefits. However, if your employer recalls you, you must be able to return to work. If you are not able to return to work upon recall your eligibility for benefits could be questioned.

Question 27: I believe that I may make more money on unemployment benefits than I would working, can I decide to go on unemployment?

Answer: No. You must be laid off, temporarily laid off, or have reduced hours from your employer to qualify for benefits. Should you walk off the job, refuse to work, or refuse to return to work without being eligible for paid leave; you will be disqualified for benefits.

Question 28: If I am paid unemployment insurance benefits, and later it is determined that I am disqualified from those benefits, will I need to pay back the benefits I received?

Answer: Yes. If the final decision is that you are not eligible, you will have to return those benefits.

Question 29: If it is determined that I have committed fraud, what happens?

Answer: If you are determined to have committed a fraud to obtain unemployment insurance benefits, you will be referred for criminal prosecution. You will also be unable to apply for benefits again until you have repaid those benefits plus the 15% federally mandated penalty on the fraudulently obtained benefits.

Question 30: If I am eligible, when would I receive my \$600 additional payment?

Answer: While we do not know the timing of when this additionally weekly benefit will be available, you will most likely receive your stimulus check before you receive these payments and hopefully that will be the bridge between now and when other benefit programs begin.

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Question 31: If I am eligible and receive my \$600 benefit, do I still get my full unemployment?

Answer: Yes, the \$600 benefit is to be additional to unemployment, and it is not deducted from the weekly benefit amount that you would receive.

Question 32: If I receive the \$600 per week payment or any other federal stimulus benefit payment and it is later determined that I should not have received it, do I have to repay the money?

Answer: Yes, any unemployment insurance benefit payment you receive and it is later determined that you were not eligible to receive, you will be required to repay.

Question 33: If I am disqualified from receiving benefits due to how I separated from my employer or I have been found to be ineligible for any other reason, will I still receive payment from the federal stimulus for \$600 per week?

Answer: No. You must be eligible for state or federal unemployment insurance benefits to be eligible to receive the additional \$600 per week.

Additional information can be found at iowaworkforcedevelopment.gov. Please check our page daily as we are updating all information as we receive it.

The above Questions and Answers are designed to assist in answering basic questions that we have received. Nothing within this guidance is legal advice; nor intended to be used for the same. Should you have questions, please refer to the Iowa Employment Security Law found at Iowa Code § 96. Further guidance and information is also available on the Federal Department of Labor which can be found at www.dol.gov/coronavirus.