



212 Second Street, Suite 204  
Lakewood, NJ 08701  
732.942.9292  
Fax 732.523.0776  
lrrcenter.org

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Providing Social Services, Information, Referral and Housing Counseling to the Lakewood and Ocean County Communities

Dear Clients,

During this trying time, the staff at the LRRRC is doing everything we can to assist the community. We are in continuous contact with federal, State, and private organizations to supply you with accurate and current program information. We are facing an unprecedented crisis, with many people losing their jobs, and businesses struggling to survive. Our caseworkers are answering calls as fast as they can, but we need your help to accommodate the need. Every day our phone lines and inboxes are flooded with hundreds of people scheduling appointments and asking questions regarding their situation. We want the community to know that we understand your frustration. We apologize for the backlog in appointments and are working overtime to address the unprecedented surge in daily appointment requests. To aid the community, we have compiled the answers to many of the most common questions we have been receiving. **Many of your questions will be answered by reviewing this document, and we strongly encourage you to review this information before calling an LRRRC representative.** You will be helping yourselves and helping others by freeing us up to assist clients with more complex situations that require specific advice. If you still have questions after reviewing this document, we urge you to schedule a phone appointment with a caseworker to discuss your situation by calling (732) 942-9292. You can also e-mail us at [questions@lrrcenter.org](mailto:questions@lrrcenter.org), and we will do our best to get back to you within 2 business days. As always, our current program literature, recent announcements, and helpful links are posted on our website at [www.info.lrrcenter.org](http://www.info.lrrcenter.org).

Thank you in advance for your understanding!

The LRRRC Staff

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# CORONAVIRUS RELIEF STIMULUS CHECKS

## 1. Will the government be sending me money?

Yes. The federal government is sending relief payments to individuals and families based on their income.

- Individuals who earned an income below \$75,000 will receive \$1,200
- Couples who earned an income below \$150,000 and filed a joint return will receive \$2,400.
- Parents will receive an additional \$500 for each child under age 17.
- Those who made higher than \$75,000 per individual and \$150,000 per couple will have their payments phased out based on their income.
- Individuals who made more than \$99,000 and couples who made more than \$198,000 will not be eligible at all.

Many families have already received these payments.

## 2. I have not yet received this payment. What do I do?

If the IRS already has your bank account information from your 2019 or 2018 return, it will transfer the money to you via direct deposit based on the recent income-tax figures it already has. The payments will also be automatic for people who receive Social Security retirement, survivor or disability benefits, and Supplemental Security Income. If you received your tax refund via check in 2019 or 2018, you will have to wait longer because the federal government is producing checks and mailing them in batches. If you prefer to receive the payment via direct deposit, you can update your information here: <https://www.irs.gov/coronavirus/get-my-payment>

## 3. I did not file taxes in 2019 or 2018. Am I eligible to receive the stimulus payment?

Assuming you fill the other eligibility criteria, you are eligible. Submit a simple return to the IRS here:

<https://www.freefilefillableforms.com/#/fd/EconomicImpactPayment>

## 4. What information will I need to enter on the IRS direct deposit information portal?

The form will ask you for the following details:

- Full name and current mailing address
- An e-mail address (required)
- Date of birth and valid Social Security number
- Bank account number, type, and routing number, if you have one

- Identity Protection Personal Identification Number (IP PIN) you received from the IRS earlier this year if you have one
- Driver's license or state-issued ID, if you have one
- For each qualifying child: name, Social Security number or Adoption Taxpayer Identification Number and their relationship to you or your spouse

### **5. What happens if I do not receive the money?**

Everyone should receive the stimulus payment either via direct deposit or through a mailed check. However, the stimulus payments are actually advanced payments of a new tax credit for the 2020 tax year. So, if you don't get the full amount you are owed now, you will likely be able to claim the difference as a tax credit next year when you file your 2020 tax return. It will either result in an additional refund or reduce the amount of tax you owe. Details about how that will work are not yet available. The stimulus payments are not taxable.

### **6. How can I check the status of my stimulus payment?**

For more information and to check the status of your stimulus payment, click here: <https://www.irs.gov/coronavirus/get-my-payment>. If the status is listed as unavailable, check back in a few days.

### **7. What If I had a child in 2019, but I haven't filed my 2019 return yet?**

If you had a baby last year, but you haven't filed your 2019 return, you might be worried about losing \$500 because the IRS doesn't know about your baby. That actually could be a problem—you won't get that extra \$500 if you don't file before the IRS starts processing your payment. However, if you have a child now that is not on your 2018 return, you'll be able to account for him or her when you file your 2020 return next year (you'll get an extra \$500 credit then). So, while you won't get that additional \$500 in your stimulus payment now, you'll still get it later.

### **8. What if I had a child in 2020 – will I receive the extra \$500?**

You will, but not until you file your 2020 return. If your stimulus check is less than what you're entitled to receive for any reason, you can make up the difference with an extra tax credit on your 2020 return.

### **9. Will I receive the extra \$500 for my 18-year-old son who lives with me?**

Anyone over the age of 16 who can be claimed as a dependent on someone else's tax return (whether or not they are actually claimed as a dependent) won't receive a stimulus check and can't claim the tax credit on their 2020 return. That means no payments to children living at home who are 17 or 18 years old, or to college students

who are 23 or younger at the end of the year who don't pay at least half of their own expenses. Other dependents won't receive stimulus payments, either. For example, an elderly parent living with you is not eligible.

## NJFC UPDATES

### **10. My Medicaid / CHIP coverage was up for annual renewal. Will I lose coverage during this crisis?**

No. No one will lose their Medicaid or CHIP coverage during this emergency, regardless of whether their enrollment was up for annual review or pregnancy coverage was scheduled to end. Even if your coverage was scheduled to be systematically disenrolled at the end of March, Medicaid and CHIP will continue to provide coverage for the duration of the emergency.

There are only three exceptions where people may lose Medicaid and CHIP eligibility:

- Those who move out of State
- Those who ask to be terminated, and
- Those who become eligible for Medicare.

### **11. I usually renew my Medicaid / CHIP coverage around this time. Will I be asked to renew during this crisis?**

Annual renewals may have been delayed. If you receive renewal paperwork, make sure to complete it and return on time.

### **12. Do I need to pay a copay to get myself or my child tested or treated for COVID-19?**

No Medicaid or CHIP enrollee will have to pay copays for COVID testing or office visits related to COVID testing.

### **13. Do I need to pay my CHIP premium during this crisis?**

No. No Medicaid or CHIP enrollee will have to pay premiums during the emergency, including children on Plan D. Any payments made during this time will be credited towards future bills.

### **14. What other changes have NJFC made during this crisis?**

Firstly, no Medicaid or CHIP enrollee will have to go through a prior authorization process for any hospitalization. Secondly, NJ FamilyCare enrollees can refill their prescriptions early and can get 90 days of their maintenance medication prescriptions filled at one time.

## SNAP AND PANDEMIC-EBT

### **15. Do I need to be working to be eligible for SNAP during this crisis?**

No. The Governor has temporarily waived the work requirement for the SNAP program. Anyone who applies for benefits will not have to participate in work activities at this time. Additionally, any open case that has a family member who is not being counted because he/she is not meeting the work requirement should qualify for additional benefits. Lakewood residents can respectfully e-mail [snaplk@ocbss.ocean.nj.us](mailto:snaplk@ocbss.ocean.nj.us) and request that their case be reevaluated.

### **16. Is SNAP increasing their benefits during this crisis? (Updated 7/2/2020)**

Yes. If you currently receive SNAP benefits, you may have received an extra benefit payment from March through July. The extra benefit is the difference in your current benefit and the maximum benefit amount for your family size.

### **17. Do I need to do anything to get the extra SNAP benefits?**

No. For those who qualify, the additional benefits were automatically added to their EBT card.

### **18. Is there any additional assistance to help purchase food during this time? (Updated 7/2/2020)**

Yes. A nutritional assistance program called Pandemic-EBT (P-EBT) was created to assist during COVID-19. NJ will be providing each eligible student with \$416.10 to help with nutritional support. No application is necessary to receive this benefit. Human Services is working with schools to identify students who were receiving free or reduced school meals. Eligible students already participating in SNAP will receive the Pandemic-EBT on their household's existing Families First card. All other Pandemic-EBT eligible households will be mailed a P-EBT card. Benefits to be delivered starting July 8<sup>th</sup>.

### **19. Are all students eligible for P-EBT benefits? (Updated 6/16/2020)**

All students who were approved to receive free or reduced-price meals as of March 18<sup>th</sup>, if not for their school closure due to COVID-19, are eligible to receive P-EBT. If parents opted out of the lunch program or if they became eligible after March 18<sup>th</sup>, it would not help to apply now. Students in schools where the entire student body receives free meals regardless of income will all receive this benefit. This program is only for school-aged children, not students in daycares.

## CHILD CARE SUBSIDIES UPDATE (CHS)

### **20. I am currently receiving child care subsidies through CHS, and I was temporarily laid off. Will I be terminated from the child care subsidies program?**

No one will be terminated at this time, including those who cannot provide information about returning to work after a temporary change. However, you need to notify your CHS caseworker about this change.

### **21. I know that one temporary change is allowed per year while receiving child care subsidies. If I am temporarily laid off now and have a baby later in the year, will I be terminated at that time?**

No. If a family asks for a temporary change as a result of COVID-19, it will not reflect against a future temporary change during their period of eligibility.

## JOB-RELATED COVERAGE FOR COVID-19

There are several government assistance programs available to you if you are experiencing a change in your ability to work due to COVID-19.

### Tax-Related Provisions from the Federal Government through FFCRA

### **22. I am unable to work because I must be home to watch my children. What assistance is available?**

The federal government created a program to help employers continue to pay their employees during COVID-19 through the Families First Coronavirus Response Act (FFCRA). There are two broad types of assistance available starting April 2<sup>nd</sup> – (1) paid sick leave for employees who are sick or seeking a diagnosis and (2) paid family leave for those unable to work due to childcare or other medical reasons. Each program has its requirements and qualifying conditions. In both cases, employers must lay out the wages and will be reimbursed fully through payroll taxes. There is also a refundable income tax credit for self-employed individuals.

- If you are an **employee**, we encourage you to talk to your employer to find out if this leave covers you.
- If you are an **employer**, we encourage you to speak to your tax and business consultant to learn about the rules and to take advantage of these programs to help your employees get through this difficult time.
- If you are **self-employed**, there is a refundable income tax credit that may help you.

### **23. How much of my salary will these programs cover?**

- **PAID SICK LEAVE:** The paid sick leave will provide 100% of wages up to \$511/day for 10 days for someone who is sick themselves, and 67% of wages up to \$200/day for 10 days for someone caring for another individual who is sick.

- **PAID FAMILY LEAVE:** The paid family leave will provide 67% of wages up to \$200/day for 12 weeks for someone who is caring for a child whose school is closed. The first 10 days are unpaid, but the employee can overlap with 10 days of paid sick leave. Discuss with your employer whether you can take paid family leave intermittently and whether you can receive the remaining 1/3 of your salary through PTO or other paid leave.

For more information and FAQs, click here: <https://www.dol.gov/agencies/whd/pandemic/ffcra-questions>

## Earned Sick Leave

### **24. What is Earned Sick Leave? Do I qualify?**

This is not new. Effective October 2018, all NJ employers must provide Earned Sick Leave to their employees. An employee can accrue 1 hour of earned sick leave for every 30 hours worked up to 40 hours per year. Earned sick leave accrued may be used for many situations associated with the current pandemic. These situations include someone who has symptoms of COVID-19, an employee who was exposed and quarantined, an employee that does not want to work because he is afraid of getting the virus, and a worker who is unable to work because of school or daycare closure. You can read more about Earned Sick Leave here:

<https://www.nj.gov/labor/worker-protections/earnedsick/law.shtml>

## Unemployment Insurance and Pandemic Unemployment Assistance (PUA)

### Benefits and Application Process

### **25. I am out of work. What should I do?**

People in the following situations are eligible for unemployment insurance:

- A person who is out of work because their employer voluntarily closed, including an employee who was put on furlough.
- A person who is out of work because their employer was ordered closed.
- A worker who has fewer work hours available due to business slow down or lack of demand.

If you fall into one of the above-listed categories, you can apply online here: <https://myunemployment.nj.gov/>

### **26. When should I apply for Unemployment?**

Although benefits will be retroactive to the end of January, we recommend that you apply for Unemployment right away. Since the website is limited and volume is high, we also recommend taking screenshots and saving proof of your application to ensure that you receive retroactive benefits.

### **27. How much money will I receive if I am approved for Unemployment Insurance?**

You will receive 60% of your average weekly earnings during the base year up to \$713 per week. For claims filed in April 2020, the base year is January 1, 2019, through December 31, 2019. The full base chart is on page #9 of this document:

<https://www.lrrcenter.org/public/user/pages/files/brochures/Paid%20Work%20Leaves.Brochure.website.pdf>

Anyone eligible for Unemployment will receive an additional \$600 per week above their calculated benefit amount until the week of July 25, 2020 (and retroactive to the week ending on April 4, 2020).

### **28. What do I need to do to receive the extra \$600?**

You do not need to do anything. This payment will automatically be sent as a second deposit to the account in which you receive your unemployment benefits – there is no need to submit an additional application.

### **29. Can I receive extra benefits if I have dependents?**

Yes. Your weekly benefit amount could increase by up to 15% because of dependency benefits. Here are a few facts about dependency benefits:

- Dependency benefits are only available if your spouse is not employed during the week that you establish your claim.
- Dependency benefits offer an extra 7% for the first dependent and an additional 4% for each of the next two dependents.
- A dependent can be an unemployed spouse or an unmarried child under the age of 19.
- Only one spouse can claim dependency benefits.
- An unmarried child who is a full-time student is considered a dependent as long as he/she is younger than 22.
- Even if you are eligible for dependency benefits, the standard weekly benefit amount will not exceed \$713.

### **30. How do I receive dependency benefits?**

To receive dependency benefits, you will need to answer yes to question 3.5 on the Unemployment application ("do you wish to claim a dependency allowance). You should then mail proof of dependents within six weeks of filing your claim. You can submit a copy of your most recent federal or state tax return as proof of dependents.

Dependency benefit forms are available

here: <https://www.lrrcenter.org/public/user/pages/files/applications/Paid%20Leaves/Unemployment.Dependency%20Benefits.Application.pdf>

**31. Will my unemployment benefits be counted towards eligibility for government programs?**

Regular Unemployment Insurance benefits received (60% of wages) will be counted towards eligibility for NJFamilyCare, SNAP, The Marketplace, and Section 8 (HUD Rental Assistance). The extra \$600 weekly payment will not be counted towards eligibility for NJFamilyCare or Section 8. It will be counted by SNAP, and The Marketplace (for purposes of tax credits and cost-sharing). All Unemployment benefits are taxable. As always, all changes must be reported to processing agencies.

**32. How long will my unemployment benefits last? (Updated 7/1/2020)**

Typically, Unemployment Insurance lasts for 26 weeks. Due to COVID-19, the federal government will be providing an additional 13 weeks of benefits. Once those benefits are exhausted, the State will be providing 20 additional weeks. The additional 20 weeks of benefits brings to 59 the maximum number of weeks an eligible claimant may receive in benefits at this time. Claimants will be automatically enrolled into extended benefits as their federal extension ends. You do not need to contact an agent or reapply. The supplemental \$600/week will be provided through July 25<sup>th</sup>.

**33. I tried to apply for Unemployment online but ran into an error. What should I do?**

If you run into an error while applying, you should keep trying via the Internet Explorer browser. Make sure there is no other claim open with your e-mail address, if there is, you must use another e-mail address. If you still experience trouble, you should reach out to the unemployment office for assistance by calling 856-507-2340, 201-601-4100, 732-761-2020, or 732-761-2021.

**34. I try to call the Unemployment office at least 10 times throughout the day, and I have not yet been successful at reaching a representative. I am so frustrated. What should I do? How can I reach someone? (Updated 6/10/2020)**

The Department of Labor asks that everyone be patient as they are experiencing record-high call volume. We have heard feedback that the following process may work: Call 732-761-2021 at around 7:36 am - you will hear a recording that the Employment Center is Closed. Keep Calling. At roughly 7:40 am, the recording will change, and you will hear one of five messages.

- Due to high volume of calls... – If you hear this, hang up and redial.
- Thank you for calling the New Jersey Department of Labor – If you hear this, hang up and redial.

- Please hold for the next available agent – If you hear this, stay on hold, do not choose any options, and wait for an agent to answer.
- Ringing and then hold music - If you hear this, stay on hold, do not choose any options, and wait for an agent to answer.
- Recording asking you to leave your name and number for someone to call you back – leave a message and stay off your phone. A representative will call you back from a restricted number. Make sure your phone accepts calls from private phone numbers.

If you do not reach a representative, try again tomorrow. There are tens of thousands of people in the same situation as you. All benefits will be retroactive.

#### Eligibility for Business Owners, Self-Employed and Others Affected by COVID-19 (PUA)

**35. I am self-employed / an independent contractor and cannot work due to COVID-19. Given the nature of my job, until now, I did not qualify for Unemployment Insurance. Is there any assistance available to me?**

Yes. On March 27<sup>th</sup>, a law expanding unemployment assistance was passed. The law creates Pandemic Unemployment Assistance (PUA), which will provide unemployment benefits to many that are typically not eligible for Unemployment, including those who are self-employed, independent contractors, those with limited work history, and others.

**36. What are the eligibility requirements for Pandemic Unemployment Assistance? (Updated 5/25/2020)**

A NJ worker who is otherwise able to work and available to work except that they are unemployed, partially unemployed, or unable or unavailable to work and is experiencing any of the following COVID-19 scenarios would likely be eligible for Pandemic Unemployment Assistance (PUA):

- diagnosed with COVID-19 or experiencing symptoms and seeking medical diagnosis
- member of the individual's household diagnosed with COVID-19
- providing care for family member or member of household who has been diagnosed with COVID-19
- individual is primary caregiver for child or family member unable to attend school or another facility closed due to COVID-19
- unable to reach place of employment due to an imposed quarantine or because advised by medical provider to self-quarantine due to COVID-19

- was scheduled to commence employment and does not have a job or is unable to reach the job due to COVID-19
- became breadwinner because the head of household has died from COVID-19
- quit their job because they were diagnosed with COVID-19 and continuing work is not possible, or because they came into contact with an individual who was diagnosed with COVID-19 and a medical professional advised they resign in order to quarantine
- place of employment is closed due to the COVID-19 public health emergency
- self-employed / independent contractors / 1099 filers / farmers - and impacted by COVID-19
- seeking part-time employment but impacted by COVID-19
- does not have sufficient work history and impacted by COVID-19
- otherwise not qualified for regular or extended Unemployment benefits and impacted by COVID-19
- exhausted all benefits under regular Unemployment and impacted by COVID-19 (but if combined UI and extended benefit payments total 39 weeks, no additional benefits are available)

### **37. How do I apply for PUA?**

The first step is to complete a regular unemployment application at [www.myunemployment.nj.gov](http://www.myunemployment.nj.gov). If you only qualify for Unemployment due to one of the expanded PUA categories, you will likely receive a denial determination. You will then automatically be assessed for PUA eligibility. The State is advising anyone who applied for Unemployment benefits and got a denial to wait for a PUA determination. There is no need to complete additional paperwork, to call or to e-mail. If you are self-employed, use the application guide at this link to help you apply: <https://myunemployment.nj.gov/labor/myunemployment/independentcontractors.shtml>. If you have already applied for state unemployment, you do not need to do anything else right now. Due to record high volume, processing times are delayed. Please be patient, all approved benefits will be retroactive.

### **38. How much money will I receive if I am approved for PUA?**

Those who are approved for PUA will receive 60% of their average weekly wages, as well as an additional \$600/week until the week of July 25, 2020. You may also be eligible for dependency benefits (see above). PUA claims will be backdated to the date you first became eligible, so you won't lose any benefits. The first week of potential eligibility is the week ending February 8, 2020.

### **39. I am self-employed. How will my wages be calculated for PUA?**

Wages for self-employed will be calculated based on *net* earnings on your 2019 return. In the absence of a 2019 return, wages will be based on your 2018 return. You may be required to produce income records for 2018 and

2019, so you should start gathering those documents. If you started your business in 2020, you might still qualify. You should apply. If you are eligible, you will receive at least \$231 + \$600 weekly, even if that is more than 60% of your average weekly earnings.

**40. I was about to start a job. Will I qualify for Unemployment? What if I did not fulfill the work requirement?**

You may still qualify. Generally, to be eligible for Unemployment, you would have to fulfill the work requirement during the base year. The NJ base year and alternate base year charts can be viewed here: <https://myunemployment.nj.gov/labor/myunemployment/before/about/who/>. However, PUA allows someone who does not have sufficient work history and who is impacted by COVID-19 to qualify.

**41. I am employed by a religious institution that does not pay into NJ State Unemployment Insurance. Do I qualify for Unemployment benefits during this time? What about if I receive parsonage?**

You will likely qualify for Pandemic Unemployment Assistance. You should complete an application following the instructions above.

**42. Do I qualify for Unemployment benefits for lost scholarship?**

No.

**43. I have both W2 and 1099 income. I applied for Unemployment and got approved for a benefit only based on my W2 income. What should I do?**

Since you qualify for benefits for your self-employment only through PUA, and you did not receive a denial, you should appeal the decision and ask for your self-employment income to be included in the benefit calculation. You can submit an appeal here:

<https://myunemployment.nj.gov/labor/myunemployment/appeals/claimant/>

**44. If I become temporarily disabled while receiving Unemployment, do I still qualify for Unemployment?**

You will qualify for Disability During Unemployment. You should notify Unemployment when you certify for benefits. You will not get the additional \$600/week.

**45. My employer is allowing me to work from home with pay. However, because my children are out of school and my spouse is working, I need to care for them, and it is too difficult to work from home. Do I qualify for Unemployment?**

You should first speak to your employer about getting Paid Sick Leave or Paid Family Leave (described in the section above). If you are the primary caregiver of a child who is at home due to a forced school closure that directly results from the COVID-19 public health emergency, you may be eligible for PUA. We strongly encourage all employees to attempt to work out a working arrangement with their employers that is agreeable to all parties before filing for Unemployment. Also, you should bear in mind that the CARES Act provides PUA only when a child is home because of a school closure that is a direct result of the COVID-19 public health emergency. A school is not closed as a direct result of the COVID-19 public health emergency after the date the school year was originally scheduled to end. That means that, once the school year is over, parents should rely on their customary summer arrangements for caring for their children, and will not, absent some other qualifying circumstances, be eligible to receive PUA. If, however, the facility that they rely on to provide summer care for the child is also closed as a direct result of the COVID-19 public health emergency, they may continue to qualify for PUA. Similarly, if there is some other reason under which they qualify for PUA, they will continue to be eligible to receive benefits.

**46. My employer is allowing me to work from home with pay. My children are home from school, but they are mature enough to take care of themselves during my work hours. Do I qualify for Unemployment?**

As stated above, before thinking about filing for Unemployment, you should speak to your employer about getting Paid Sick Leave or Paid Family Leave in order to protect the future of your job. According to the Department of Labor, you may be eligible for PUA if you are a primary caregiver of a child whose care requires "such ongoing and constant attention that it is not possible for you to perform your customary work functions at home. For example, if your employer allows you to telework and you are caring for a more mature child who is able to care for him or herself for much of the day, you likely would not qualify for PUA because you are still able to work."

**47. I am not able to work since I have young children who are home from school due to COVID-19, and nobody available to watch them. My employer is offering to pay me 2/3 of my salary through FFCRA. I will make more money from Unemployment. Can I choose to apply for Unemployment, rather than accept payment from my employer? (Updated 5/22/2020)**

The intent of Unemployment is to provide help to individuals who are unemployed or partially unemployed. If you are being offered FFCRA, you are still employed and should not apply for Unemployment.

**48. I am a school teacher and only work during the school year. Can I continue collecting Unemployment benefits during the summer months, when I never work? (Updated 6/25/2020)**

No. Unemployment is for lost wages. You are only eligible for benefits during weeks that you typically work, or you were planning on working, but you were not able to due to the pandemic.

**49. What do I do about health insurance now that I am unemployed?**

If you receive health insurance from your employer, and are planning to file for Unemployment, clarify with your employer if COBRA is an option and how much it will cost you. You may want to explore enrolling in NJ FamilyCare or The Marketplace, depending on your income and situation. You can view our healthcare program literature for more information at [info.lrrcenter.org](http://info.lrrcenter.org). If you are receiving other paid work leave, discuss with your employer whether your health insurance contribution will change.

**Certifying for Benefits**

**50. Do I need to do anything while receiving Unemployment Insurance?**

You must certify for benefits each week. Before certifying for benefits, review this helpful guide: <https://myunemployment.nj.gov/labor/myunemployment/covidinstructions.shtml>. Visit the Unemployment homepage for instructions on when to certify for benefits. They are updating the schedule often, so make sure to check each week for the weekly schedule. You will need to report any earnings from any job when you certify.

**51. When should I start certifying for benefits? (Updated 5/25/2020)**

You will likely receive an e-mail or letter with instructions about when to start certifying. This letter is an auto-generated letter instructing you to start certifying for benefits 17 days after the date of your claim. Due to record high claim volume, chances are your claim will not be processed and ready for weekly benefits certification by then. Therefore, if you try certifying for benefits based on their instructions but are told your claim cannot be processed, do not panic. Instead, check your claim status here:

<https://lwdwebpt.dol.state.nj.us/ClaimStatus/claimStatus.htm>. If your claim is pending, or your benefit amount is zero, you will not be able to certify for benefits. As soon as your status shows filed with a benefit amount other than \$0 you should start claiming based on the schedule. Once your claim is processed, you will be able to claim benefits for all previous weeks. If you get a letter or e-mail explicitly telling you to certify for PUA benefits, follow those instructions as your claim was likely processed.

**52. I checked my claim status, and the system says I have a \$0 benefit amount. What does that mean?**

**(Updated 5/21/2020)**

If your claim status is "Filed" with a \$0 benefit amount, the Department of Labor is still reviewing your claim. Check your e-mail (and junk e-mail folder) for an e-mail from e-Adjudication that may ask for more information needed to determine your eligibility for benefits.

**53. I tried to claim benefits, and the system says "claim not payable." What does that mean?**

**(Updated 5/19/2020)**

Tens of thousands of New Jersey residents are receiving that message when they try to claim benefits. During the certification process you likely answered one of the 7 questions in a manner in which, under regular conditions, would require speaking with an agent to complete the process. During the pandemic, these restrictions have been modified to allow claimants to answer the questions per the COVID-19 circumstances. You will be notified by e-mail when your claim is payable. At that point, you will have to recertify for all the weeks that your claim was not payable.

**54. I received an e-mail with a certifying guide for COVID-19. Am I supposed to fill it out?**

No. This is a reference guide for you to use when you're ready to certify. You do not need to fill it out and send it back.

**55. I was approved for benefits, but I am only being given the option to claim benefits from last week.**

**How can I get the retroactive benefits?**

Generally, unemployment benefits only go retroactive as of the week that you filed. PUA will provide the benefits retroactive to the date that you became unemployed. When you certify for weekly benefits, look out for the option to certify for previous weeks. Since PUA is a new program and the State is still finalizing details, it may take some time to receive the option to certify for previous weeks. Be patient – there are tens of thousands of people in the same situation as you.

**56. I am self-employed and do not have any work due to COVID-19. I followed the application guide in #35 above when applying, but only get approved for \$231/week. What is going on? Should I appeal? (Updated 6/3/2020)**

Anyone who is eligible for PUA, but for whom available wage records are incomplete, are receiving weekly PUA payments for the minimum amount of \$231, plus the separate \$600 weekly supplemental benefit after

certifying for benefits. You will be contacted separately to update your income information, and any necessary adjustment to your weekly benefit rate will be made based on the updated income information you provide. You should not appeal the decision. The Department of Labor will automatically be going back to your file to review whether you are eligible for additional benefits. You may be required to produce income records for 2018 and 2019, so you should make sure they are prepared and available.

**57. I am self-employed. How do I report my weekly wages when certifying for benefits?**

When you certify for benefits weekly, you must report the net earnings from your business (calculate by adding up all your income and subtracting any expenses). If you are not sure how much you earned, you should do your best to estimate and keep proofs of income and expenses as a backup. Speak to your accountant if you need help calculating your net income.

Partial Unemployment Insurance

**58. Fortunately, I am still employed. However, my employer has given me far fewer hours than I worked previously. Am I eligible for any Unemployment benefits?**

Yes, if you are working more than 20 percent less than you worked previously, you may qualify for partial unemployment benefits. To qualify, you must have experienced at least a 20 percent reduction in your work hours. For example, if you worked a 40-hour week, you will only be eligible for benefits if you cannot work more than 32 hours.

**59. How much money will I receive under partial Unemployment Insurance?**

The Partial Benefit Rate is calculated using the following steps:

- First, your Weekly Benefit Rate is determined based on 60% of your average weekly earnings before having your hours reduced. For example, if your average weekly earnings were \$500, your Weekly Benefit Rate would be \$300.
- Next, 20% of that number is added on top of your Weekly Benefit Rate. This new number is called your Partial Benefit Rate. For example, if your Weekly Benefit Rate was \$300, your Partial Benefit Rate would be \$360.
- You will then receive the above-calculated number MINUS any money that you have earned in the past week. For example, if your Partial Benefit Rate is \$360, and you were able to work a bit during the week and earned \$100, that week, you will receive \$260 in benefits. If the next week you can work a little more, making \$200, you will receive a weekly benefit of \$160.

- Any income that you earn that is less than 20% of your adjusted weekly benefit amount will result in you receiving your regular Weekly Benefit Rate benefit (and will not be deducted from your partial benefit rate). For example, if your Partial Benefit Rate is \$360 and you work and make \$50, you will receive your regular Weekly Benefit Rate of \$300.
- In addition to any Unemployment benefits received, as long as you receive \$1 of benefits in a week, you will receive an additional \$600 each week until the week of July 25, 2020.
- Looking at another example, let's say that until COVID-19, you made \$1,000/week. First, your Weekly Benefit Rate will be set at 60% of your base pay, namely \$600. Next, 20% of \$600 is added to the \$600, making your Partial Benefit Rate \$720. If one week you manage to work making \$200, then that week, you will receive \$520 + \$600 from Unemployment. If the next week you can work significantly more, making \$500, you will receive \$220 + \$600. If the next week you can work more, making \$850, that week, you will receive no benefits.

Following the calculation above, if you earn more than \$855 in any week, you will not be eligible for any benefits.

**60. I am working part-time while on Unemployment. Will I receive the extra \$600/week?**

As long as you receive \$1 of unemployment benefit in a week, you will also receive an additional \$600 a week until the week of July 25, 2020. Use the calculation above to determine how much you will be eligible for.

**61. I am employed full time and have a side job or business. I am still receiving my regular paycheck from my job. Am I eligible for Unemployment benefits to make up for lost side/business income?**

Since you are working, you should use the calculation above to determine how much you will be eligible for. If you are earning more than \$855/week from your employer, you will definitely not be eligible to receive any Unemployment benefits, regardless of whether you are losing money from your business.

**62. I am self-employed as a playgroup teacher, and I am receiving partial payment from parents. How do I report that?**

When you certify for benefits, report how much you received from parents that week. You can divide a monthly payment by 4.333 to calculate how much you earned per week, but that will likely be very difficult to keep track of. Therefore, we recommend reporting any payment received in the week you receive it.

Returning to Work (Follow-Up to Mr. Chaim Book's 6/23 Presentation)

**63. My employer furloughed me, but they have now reopened and asked me to return to my job. Can I remain on Unemployment?**

No. Individuals receiving regular unemployment compensation must accept any offer of suitable employment. Barring unusual circumstances, a request that a furloughed employee return to his or her job very likely constitutes an offer of suitable employment that the employee must accept. While eligibility for PUA does not require an individual to be seeking work, it does require that the individual be unemployed, partially employed, or unable or unavailable to work due to certain circumstances that are a direct result of COVID-19 or the COVID-19 public health emergency, such as lack of childcare due to school closure. In the situation outlined here, an employee who had been furloughed because his or her employer has closed the place of employment would potentially be eligible for PUA while the employer remained closed, assuming the closure was a direct result of the COVID-19 public health emergency and other qualifying conditions are satisfied. However, as soon as the business reopens, and the employee is recalled for work, eligibility for PUA would cease unless the individual could identify some other qualifying circumstance outlined in the CARES Act.

**64. I was forced to close my playgroup mid-March due to COVID-19. I have been collecting Unemployment Insurance since then. I heard playgroups in NJ are permitted to open on June 15<sup>th</sup>, and that camps are permitting to open on July 6<sup>th</sup>. I don't know what the CDC requirements are, and I would prefer to stay closed and continue collecting Unemployment benefits. Can I do that? (Updated 6/26/2020)**

No, you cannot continue to collect Unemployment benefits, unless you have another COVID-related reason for continuing to claim Unemployment. When a business owner who is allowed to reopen chooses not to do so, that person is likely not eligible for Unemployment benefits. If some children dropped out of your daycare/camp due to COVID-19, you need to make efforts to find children to fill those slots. Document all your efforts. If you need financial assistance to reopen your daycare while following CDC and other sanitation and hygiene guidelines due to COVID-19, NYS and NJ both have their respective financial assistance/grant programs available. Some available funds that we are aware of are the following: New York Forward Child Care Expansion Incentive Program, New York Forward Loan Fund, and NJ grant program for child care providers.

**65. I have been collecting Unemployment benefits since I am the primary caregiver of children whose school was closed due to COVID-19. My children's daycare has now opened, but I am worried about sending them during the pandemic. Can I choose to keep them home from daycare and continue collecting PUA? (Updated 6/26/2020)**

No. Although you are entitled to keep your child home from daycare, fear alone of sending a child to a childcare provider does not guarantee you continued PUA benefits. If your childcare provider is not meeting a level of health and safety standards that you are comfortable with, you can find another one. If your child is immunocompromised, speak to your doctor about whether he/she would recommend that the child remains at home.

**66. My child's daycare is remaining closed after June 15<sup>th</sup>. Do I have to find a new childcare provider, or can I continue claiming PUA since I am the primary caregiver and my children need constant care? (Updated 6/26/2020)**

An attempt should be made to find other suitable arrangements for your children. Keep documentation and notes to prove your efforts.

### Temporary Disability/Family Leave Insurance

**67. I am unable to work because I got sick with COVID-19. What assistance is available for me?**

You may be eligible for temporary disability and/or family leave insurance. People in the following situations are eligible for temporary disability and/or family leave insurance:

- A person who has COVID-19, or symptoms of COVID-19
- Workers who were exposed and quarantined and their companies remain open
- Workers who are immune-compromised and advised by a healthcare provider to self-quarantine
- A health care worker exposed at work and self-quarantined
- A worker who is caring for a sick family member

If you work for an employer that participates in NJ State Disability/Family Leave Insurance, you can apply online here: <https://myleavebenefits.nj.gov/>

**68. What are the income requirements to qualify for temporary disability and/or family leave insurance?**

To qualify, you must have either earned \$10,000 or worked at least 20 weeks, earning a minimum of \$200 per week during your base year. Also, for both of these programs, you will need a doctor to confirm your disability. If you have symptoms of COVID-19, we recommend calling your doctor to discuss your symptoms to help establish a chain of evidence testifying to your inability to work.

**69. How much money will I receive from temporary disability and/or family leave insurance?**

Your weekly benefit amount will be two-thirds of your average weekly earnings during your base year period. The maximum weekly benefit amount for January 1 - June 30, 2020, is \$667. For claims dated after July 1, 2020, the benefit rate increases to 85% up to a maximum weekly benefit of \$881.

**70. For how long can I receive temporary disability and/or family leave insurance?**

- **Temporary Disability Insurance:** You can receive Temporary Disability Insurance for up to 6 months (26 weeks) for every 12-month period. If you expect your disability to last longer than 12 months, you may qualify for SSI. The first week you take off is called a waiting week. If your disability continues for a total of 22 days or more, you will be paid for the waiting week. There is an option of applying for disability insurance during Unemployment.
- **Family Leave Insurance:** You can receive up to 6 weeks (42 days) of Family Leave Insurance for every 12-month period. The 12-month period begins on the first day that family leave is taken. For claims dated after July 1, 2020, you can receive up to 12 consecutive weeks of Family Leave Insurance or 56 intermittent days. You can also take Family Leave Insurance to bond with a child up until the child's first birthday.

Click here for more information and FAQs from the Department of Labor: <https://www.nj.gov/labor/worker-protections/earnedsick/covid.shtml>

## MISCELLANEOUS

**71. Do I have to submit my taxes by April 15?**

No. The federal and State tax filing deadlines have been extended until July 15.

**72. Help! I cannot pay my mortgage. Is any assistance available for me?**

Yes. The State has announced a 90-day grace period for mortgage payments for borrowers who have been economically impacted by the coronavirus outbreak. This includes a grace period for all mortgage payments, relief from fees and charges, and no credit score changes for accessing relief. Contact and work directly with your mortgage servicer to learn about and apply for available relief. Additionally, the Governor has also announced a moratorium on removals of individuals due to evictions or foreclosures.

**73. I was laid off from my job due to COVID-19. Is there any assistance available to help me with paying my rent? (Updated 6/16/2020)**

The State of New Jersey will be providing up to 6 months of temporary rental assistance for a number of low and moderate-income households that have had a substantial reduction in income or became unemployed due to

the COVID-19 pandemic. Applications will be accepted online from Monday, July 6, 2020, at 9:00 am through Friday, July 10, 2020, at 5:00 pm. For more details, click here:

[https://www.lrrcenter.org/public/news/section8\\_20200616](https://www.lrrcenter.org/public/news/section8_20200616)

Tenants may also use funds that are being held as a security deposit to pay monthly rent during this time.

*The Lakewood Resource and Referral Center provides comprehensive social service information, referrals, counseling, community education, and assistance in navigating both government and private-sector programs. We can be reached at 732-942-9292, and we are located at 212 2nd Street, Suite 204. For more information, to donate, or to be added to our mailing list to receive valuable tips and special program announcements, visit [www.lrrcenter.org](http://www.lrrcenter.org).*