

Texas Unemployment Benefits for Workers Impacted by COVID-19¹

Information and FAQ (as of March 19, 2020)

1) What are unemployment benefits?

Unemployment benefits are designed to help workers who have lost their jobs through no fault of their own. Unemployment benefits are made available through the Texas Workforce Commission (TWC). If you qualify for unemployment benefits, the state will replace at least part of your regular pay to help you meet expenses while you are unemployed.

2) How as the Texas Workforce Commission responded to COVID-19?

At this time, the Texas has not changed any laws or rules to expand unemployment benefits for workers impacted by COVID-19. However, on Friday, March 13, 2020, Governor Greg Abbott declared a disaster relating to the COVID-19 pandemic. As a result, the TWC used its authority under current law to waive two existing requirements for workers impacted by COVID-19. The following requirements are waived:

1. Work search requirements for all claimants
2. One week waiting requirement for workers impacted by COVID-19.

3) I have been impacted by COVID-19. Do I qualify for unemployment benefits?

If your employment status has been impacted by COVID-19, you may qualify for unemployment benefits. At this time, Texas has not made Disaster Unemployment Assistance available to workers who were impacted by COVID-19.

The following workers may qualify for unemployment benefits based on COVID-19 impact:

- You are quarantined by government
- You are under self-quarantine and have COVID-19
- Your employer sent you home and asked you to quarantine for a specific period of time and you either do not have paid leave or do not have enough paid leave to cover the time off
- If you stay home to care for a sick family member and lose your job and the family member is your minor child.

¹ Information provided in this FAQ comes from the Texas Workforce Commission webpages. For a direct link to the page the Department's general webpage on unemployment benefits see <https://twc.texas.gov/jobseekers/unemployment-benefits-services>. For specific information on COVID-19 and unemployment benefits see <https://twc.texas.gov/news/covid-19-resources-job-seekers>. Note: All information regarding unemployment benefits and COVID-19 is subject to change at any time due to the changing nature of the pandemic. Please check the TWC's website for updates.

- If your employer closes the business indefinitely or permanently because of COVID-19 and lays off all employees.
- If the employer keeps the business open, but lays off some staff. However, if the employer pays you for unused paid leave time (such as vacation pay), you may not be eligible or your eligibility may be delayed.
- If your employer closes the business for a specific period of time and lays off staff during that time and the employer does not pay you during the business closure and does not allow you to use paid leave to cover the time off.
- If your hours are reduced, you may be eligible for partial unemployment.

If you do not meet the above requirements, you may still be eligible for unemployment benefits. If you are unsure about your eligibility, it is recommended that you apply. The TWC will determine if you are eligible for benefits based on the length of time you worked in Texas over approximately the last year, your earnings, and the reason for your job separation. Examples of reasons that may qualify for you are: layoff, reduction in hours not related to misconduct, being fired for reasons other than misconduct, or quitting with good cause related to work. Please see [Eligibility and Benefit Amount](#) for more information on determining your eligibility.

4) Am eligible for unemployment if I am quarantined?

According to the TWC, you may be eligible for unemployment benefits if

- You are subject to a government ordered quarantine.
- Your employer sends home from work and asks you to quarantine for a specific period of time and you are not receiving other paid leave, such as sick leave or vacation, then you may be eligible for unemployment benefits.
- You are self-quarantined and you have a COVID-19 diagnosis.

5) Am I eligible for unemployment benefits if my hours are reduced as a result of COVID-19?

If your employer reduces your hours as a result of COVID-19, it is possible that you may still collect unemployment benefits while working part-time. If you qualify, you will receive partial unemployment benefits based on the percentage of hours that you work each week.

6) How do I apply for unemployment benefits?

You may apply for benefits either online at any time using [Unemployment Benefits Services](#) (ui.texasworkforce.org) or by calling TWC's Tele-Center at 800-939-6631 from 8 a.m.-6 p.m. Central Time Monday through Friday.

Steps to Submitting Online Application:

1. To create a new online account, go to [Unemployment Benefits Services](#) and click the link “[Log On with your Existing TWC User ID or create a new User ID.](#)” Then click “[Sign up for User ID.](#)”
2. You will need to enter a SSN to create an account.
3. You will be asked to answer some initial questions determine whether you can apply for benefits using the Internet or if you have to call the TWC Tele-Center at 800-939-6631.
4. Answer all questions completely. You will have an opportunity to review your answers before submitting the application.
5. At the time you submit your application you will be provided with a confirmation number. Write down the confirmation number. You cannot make changes to your application online. You must call the TWC at 800-939-6631 to make any changes to your application.
6. After you receive your confirmation number, you are not done. You must click “Next” and review the TWC requirements for receiving unemployment benefits.

Please remember to make a record of your login, password and PIN number (which you create when you apply), so that you may continue to access your account when needed. You do not need a personal email to create an account, but it is recommended that you use an email address which will allow you to retrieve a lost or forgotten password in the future.

7) May unemployment benefit applications be filed in Spanish?

Yes. Spanish Language webpage with information for filing an application:
<https://twc.texas.gov/jobseekers/servicios-de-beneficios-de-desempleo>

To start an application in Spanish, go to:
<https://apps.twc.state.tx.us/UBS/security/selfRegister.do>

8) What documents and information are needed to apply for unemployment benefits?

- Social Security number
- Last employer’s business name, address, and phone number
- First and last dates (month, day, and year) you worked for your last employer
- Number of hours you worked and your pay rate
- if you served in the military during the past 18 months, you will need military employment (service) start/end dates and a copy of your DD Form 214(s)(member copy 4 through 8)
- Alien Registration number (if not a U.S. citizen)

9) How long can I get unemployment benefits?

Benefits are available for up to 26 weeks in one 52-week calendar year.

10) How much will I receive in unemployment benefit payments?

The TWC determines your weekly unemployment benefit amount using your past wages during your base period. Your base period is the first four of the last five completed calendar quarters before the date of your initial claim. The TWC does not use the quarter in which you file or the quarter before that. They will use the one-year period before those two quarters. For example, if you filed your claim in October 2019, the base period would be from June 1, 2018 through May 31, 2019.

The minimum benefit amount is \$69 per week and the maximum is \$521 per week. The Texas Workforce Commission has created an unemployment benefits calculator that will tell you whether or not you are entitled to receive benefits, and how much those benefits may be. To access it, go [here](#).

11) When will I receive my first payment?

Your will most likely receive your first payment approximately four weeks after you apply. Your first payment will only be for one week's worth of benefits, because your first week of enrollment is a "waiting week." **However, if you qualify for unemployment benefits due to COVID-19, the "waiting week" will be waived and your first payment will be for two weeks.**

12) How will I find out if I qualify for unemployment benefits?

TWC will notify you by mail. You can also check your claim status online or call 800-558-8321 and select option 2.

13) If I qualify for unemployment benefits, what I am required to do to continue receiving benefits?

1. Register for work search with WorkInTexas.com (if required) within **three (3) business days** of the date you submitted your claim application. TWC provides a [guide](#) on registering to work and how to create an account at WorkInTexas.com.
2. Be ready, willing and able to accept full-time work.
3. Actively search for work each week and keep a detailed log of your work search activities. TWC requires you to do a minimum number of work search activities each week and may ask to look at your log to verify your activities. (Harris or Fort Bend

Counties require 3 job search activities. El Paso and Nueces Counties requires 5.) Blank work search logs can be found [here](#).

4. Continue to request payments every two weeks while you are unemployed.

IMPORTANT: It appears that the **TWC has waived the job search requirements for all claimants** due to COVID-19 and its impact on the workforce. Pay careful attention to the instructions you receive after submitting your claim to determine if this waiver applies to you.

14) Can I have my benefits deposited directly into my bank account?

Yes. For new claimants the automatic method of payments is debit card. If you want to change your payment method to direct deposit, you may so online or by phone the next business day after you first apply for unemployment benefits. You do not need to wait for a claim determination.

To change your payment option to direct deposit, you must provide:

- Nine-digit routing number for your bank or credit union
- Your account number
- Your account type (savings or checking)
- A check, not a deposit slip, for your routing or account number.

15) How do I appeal a negative determination of my unemployment benefits?

You must submit your appeal within 14 calendar days from the date the TWC mailed you the determination decision. You can file online through your TWC account or by calling 800-939-6631.

Once TWC receives your appeal request, a hearing will be scheduled and you will be mailed a packet of information to help you prepare. Your hearing will probably be by phone. Following the hearing, the hearing officer will decide on your case and mail the decision to you.

16) What do I do when I go back to work?

Stop filing your Payment Requests. No other notification is needed. If you begin working during a Payment Request period, you may be eligible for a partial payment. Report your earnings for that period and then stop filing.

17) What if I have questions that are not answered in this FAQ?

Call the TWC Tele-Center at 800-939-6631 Monday - Friday, to speak with a service representative.