



Breaking Barriers to Justice

COVID-19 and UNEMPLOYMENT BENEFITS

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

NOTE: The Frequently Asked Questions below were written to help answer questions we have heard because of the COVID-19 emergency. It is important to have reliable information when dealing with a public health emergency. However, the situation is changing very rapidly and the information below may not be up-to-date. Under normal circumstances, many of the answers may be different. The information that follows is based on Illinois and US laws, regulations, and emergency orders. This information is intended only to be an overview of your rights. Since every case is different, you should not rely on this information as a substitute for an attorney.

I lost my job. How do I pay rent?

You can apply for unemployment benefits with the Illinois Department of Employment Security (IDES). You can apply online at www.ides.illinois.gov or call 1-800-244-5631. IDES offices are currently closed to the public so you cannot apply in person.

IDES has set aside specific dates and times to apply depending on the first letter of your last name.

If your last name starts with the letter A-M, you can apply online on Sundays, Tuesdays, and Thursdays, or call to apply on Tuesdays and Thursdays.

If your last name starts with the letter N-Z, you can apply online on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays, or call to apply on Mondays and Wednesdays.

My work has closed down temporarily because of the shelter in place order. Should I apply for unemployment benefits?

Yes. If you are unemployed through no fault of your own and your layoff is temporary, you may be eligible for unemployment benefits.

What if I quit my job because I was concerned about COVID-19?

It depends on the facts. Generally, a person is not eligible if they leave work voluntarily without a good reason that is attributable to the employer.

If you lost your job because you or a family member has been diagnosed with COVID-19 or you are otherwise quarantined, you may still be eligible for unemployment benefits if you meet all the other eligibility requirement including being able and available for work. Similarly, if you aren't able to work because your child's school or daycare has closed, you may be eligible for benefits if you meet the other eligibility requirements.

I heard I will receive more unemployment compensation. Is that true?

Yes. Until July 31, 2020, most claimants will receive their usual calculated benefits plus an additional \$600 per week in unemployment benefits.

Do I still have to look for work to receive unemployment benefits?

Maybe. You must still be able and available to work. IDES is supposed to provide flexibility where job searches are impacted by COVID-19. You must also register with the state employment service at Illinois JobLink.

During the shelter in place order, you are considered able and available for work if there was some work you could perform from home and there is a labor market for that work.

How long will I be able to receive unemployment benefits?

Illinois provides benefits for 26 weeks. Under the federal CARES Act signed into law on March 27, 2020, Illinois will provide an additional 13 weeks of unemployment benefits for a total of 39 weeks. It is unclear whether it will be the usual calculated amount or the additional \$600 a week.

If you already exhausted or are close to exhausting your unemployment benefits, you may be eligible for another 13 weeks of benefits.

I'm an Uber driver. Am I eligible for any unemployment benefits?

Maybe. The CARES Act provides emergency unemployment assistance to self-employed workers including freelancers, independent contractors, those working the gig economy, and those who have not worked long enough to qualify for state benefits, if you meet certain requirements. However, it is taking IDES time to build out this new program.

What if I am denied unemployment?

You should file an appeal. The appeal must be filed within 30 days of the finding of ineligibility. Forms and instructions are available at www.illinoislegalaid.org.

Are there other legal resources available besides Land of Lincoln?

The Public Interest Law Initiative PILI has set up the COVID-19 Illinois Free Legal Answers Task Force. [Illinois Free Legal Answers](http://il.freelegalanswers.org) is a secure website (il.freelegalanswers.org) where low-income Illinoisans can ask a lawyer a question about a civil legal issue.

You can also call or email the Illinois Lawyer Finder Service. The telephone number is 800-922-8757 and the website is www.isba.org/public/illinoislawyerfinder.

Illinois Legal Aid Online also has a lot of legal information at www.illinoislegalaid.org.

**Land of Lincoln Legal Aid
Legal Advice & Referral Center
Phone: (618) 394-7300
1 (877) 342-7891**

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