



# Common COVID-19 (Coronavirus) Related Benefits Questions & Answers

Please note that the information below is subject to change and we will regularly update this document to reflect these changes. Furthermore, much of this information is specific to the state of Louisiana. This document was updated on April 29, 2020.

## Economic Impact Payment (a.k.a "Stimulus Checks")

### Will I get an Economic Impact Payment?

If you meet all of the following guidelines, you are likely eligible for a full Economic Impact Payment: your gross income in 2019 was less than \$75,000 as a single person or less than \$150,000 as a couple; you cannot be claimed as a dependent on someone else's taxes; and you are a U.S. citizen.

The full Economic Impact Payment for eligible individuals is \$1,200 and \$2,400 for couples.

Parents of children under the age of 17 are eligible to get an additional \$500 for each qualifying child. People will not receive the additional \$500 payment for adult dependents they claim on their taxes. Furthermore, adults who can be claimed as dependents on someone else's 2019 tax return will not be eligible for their own Economic Impact Payment.

### I think I'm eligible. Do I need to file taxes to get my Economic Impact Payment?

You will likely need to file taxes if you do not receive Social Security, Supplemental Security Income, or Railroad Retirement benefits, your gross income was above \$12,200 as a single person or above \$24,400 as a couple, and you never filed taxes in 2018 or 2019.

For those who want to wait to file taxes until they can visit a tax professional or local community organization in person to get help with a tax return, the Economic Impact Payments will be available throughout the rest of 2020.

**What if I did not have to file a tax return in 2018 or 2019 and I get Social Security benefits, Supplemental Security Income (SSI), or VA benefits? Will I automatically get an Economic Impact Payment and a benefit for my dependent child?**

If you get Supplemental Security Income (SSI), Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI), Social Security Retirement, Childhood Disability Benefits, Disabled Widowers Benefits, or VA benefits and have no dependents, you will not need to do anything to get your Economic Impact Payment for yourself.

However, since the IRS does not have information about any dependent children individuals in this category may have, eligible individuals would automatically receive \$1,200 without the additional payment for dependents. If you receive SSDI, Social Security Retirement, Childhood Disability Benefits, or Disabled Widowers benefits, the deadline has passed to provide the IRS with the information needed to qualify for dependent payments.

\*\*\*If you get SSI or VA benefits and did not file taxes in 2018 or 2019, you have until Tuesday, May 5, 2020, to notify the IRS of your dependent children under 17 years old so that you may receive additional funds for those dependents. To do this, you can use the IRS tool called *Non-Filers: Enter Payment Info Here*. To begin this process, follow this link: <https://www.irs.gov/coronavirus/non-filers-enter-payment-info-here>.

**What if I did not have to file a tax return in 2018 or 2019 because I did not make enough money? Can I get a payment?**

If you did not receive SSI, Social Security, or VA benefits, had an annual income under \$12,200 as an individual or \$24,400 as a couple in 2019, and cannot be claimed as a dependent on someone else's taxes, you should use the IRS online tool called *Non-Filers: Enter Payment Info Here* to get a payment. This tool will allow you to report the information the IRS needs to determine if you and your dependents are eligible for an Economic Impact Payment and how to send you that payment. You can begin this process by visiting this website: <https://www.irs.gov/coronavirus/non-filers-enter-payment-info-here>.

**How will I get my payment?**

If you receive SSI or Social Security benefits and you did not file taxes in 2018 or 2019, the IRS will likely send you your Economic Impact Payment to the bank account your SSI or Social Security payments are sent to, the bank account you listed when using the Non-Filer tool, or by mail. If you receive your Social Security or SSI benefits through Direct Express and do not provide the IRS with other banking information on your tax return or with the non-filer tool, your Economic Impact Payment will be sent by mail.

If you filed taxes for 2018 or 2019, the IRS would use the payment information you included when filing your tax return.

If you are eligible to use the IRS' new *Non-Filers: Enter Payment Info Here* tool, mentioned in the section above, the IRS will use the payment method you list in that tool. If no bank account information is provided when you use this tool, your payment will be sent by mail.

If you have not received your payment yet, you can use the IRS' *Get My Payment* tool to track your payment and update your payment method. You can find this tool here: <https://www.irs.gov/coronavirus/get-my-payment>.

### **What if I get SSI, Medicaid, or other public benefits? Will the Economic Impact Payment make me lose my benefits?**

No. for the first 12 months you have them, these payments will not cause your Supplemental Security Income (SSI), Social Security, food stamps, housing assistance, Medicaid, or other benefits to be lowered or eliminated. If you still have some of the payment leftover after 12 months, it could be considered a resource for SSI or Medicaid.

### **Do I need to report the income from my Economic Impact Payment to SSI, Medicaid, or other offices that oversee my public benefits?**

Yes, until further notice, continue reporting all income changes to these offices. We will update this page if new information on this topic becomes available.

**For more information on Economic Impact Payments, please visit the following:**

<https://www.irs.gov/newsroom/economic-impact-payments-what-you-need-to-know>;

<https://www.irs.gov/newsroom/irs-operations-during-covid-19-mission-critical-functions-continue>;

<https://www.ssa.gov/coronavirus/>;

<https://www.irs.gov/coronavirus/non-filers-enter-payment-info-here>;

<https://www.irs.gov/coronavirus/economic-impact-payment-information-center>;

[https://blog.ssa.gov/new-guidance-about-covid-19-economic-impact-payments/?utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_source=govdelivery](https://blog.ssa.gov/new-guidance-about-covid-19-economic-impact-payments/?utm_medium=email&utm_source=govdelivery);

<https://home.treasury.gov/news/press-releases/sm979>; and

<https://www.irs.gov/coronavirus/get-my-payment>.

<https://www.va.gov/opa/pressrel/pressrelease.cfm?id=5423>

## **Tax Help**

**What's the deadline to file taxes?**

The deadline to file your 2019 federal and Louisiana state taxes is extended to July 15, 2020. However, if you have not filed your taxes for 2018 or years prior, the deadline to file for these years is April 15, 2020.

### **How can I file taxes for free?**

For people who have a simple tax return, you can file federal and state returns for free online with [MyFreeTaxes.com](https://www.myfreetaxes.com).

If you made less than \$56,000 last year, live in South-East Louisiana, and you need help filing, you can contact United Way's Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA) professional at 504-236-8823 and get assistance over the phone.

### **I am having problems with the IRS. Where can I get help?**

If your family income is less than 250% of the federal poverty level, you may be eligible for help through the Low-Income Tax Payer Clinic through South Louisiana Legal Services. You can reach them at 877-521-6242, ext. 225.

**For more information on taxes during the COVID-19 pandemic, please visit the following:**

<https://revenue.louisiana.gov/NewsAndPublications/NewsReleaseDetails/11484>; and

<https://www.irs.gov/newsroom/irs-operations-during-covid-19-mission-critical-functions-continue>

## **Unemployment Insurance**

### **Should I apply for Unemployment Insurance?**

In response to the COVID-19 crisis, people who might not usually be eligible for state Unemployment Insurance benefits may now be found eligible for federal Pandemic Unemployment Assistance. Each case is reviewed separately. You MAY be eligible for unemployment assistance if the any of the following situations apply to you *and* you would be able and available to work, were it not for reasons related to COVID-19:

1. Your work hours (including self-employment work) have been reduced because of COVID-19;
2. Your workplace closes temporarily and you are not being paid;
3. You were told not to go to work and you are not being paid while at home; or
4. You were employed between October 2018 and December 2019, and you lost your job or had your hours reduced through no fault of your own, but for reasons unrelated to COVID-19.

## **How can I apply for Unemployment Insurance and Pandemic Unemployment Assistance?**

You can file a claim at <https://www.louisianaworks.net/> or by calling 1-866-783-5567.

Before you begin the application process, be sure to have the following information on hand: Social Security Number; home and mailing addresses; telephone number; email address; bank account information; names, addresses, and phone numbers of employers you worked for from 2018 to present. You will also need the first and last day you worked with these employers; hours worked, and pay rate of jobs worked; the reason(s) you left your job(s); and information about pension or severance package (if applicable).

When applying, be sure to answer "yes" to the question, "Are you filing for Unemployment Insurance benefits for reasons related to COVID-19?" if that is true to your situation.

## **How much will I get in Unemployment Insurance?**

The amount you get in unemployment insurance depends on your previous earnings. Louisiana pays a maximum of \$247 in weekly unemployment benefits. For anyone who is eligible for at least \$1 in regular state Unemployment Insurance or who is eligible for Pandemic Unemployment Assistance, the federal government will pay an additional \$600 per week until July 31, 2020.

## **How long will my Unemployment Insurance last?**

Louisiana residents could get up to 39 weeks of Unemployment Insurance benefits due to changes made by the federal government related to COVID-19.

To continue getting Unemployment Insurance beyond the first week, you have to file a weekly certification and report any earnings for the weeks that you work while you are receiving Unemployment, even if you've not yet been paid. Report the gross amount of earnings before deductions.

## **Do I need to report the income from my Unemployment Insurance payments to SSI, Medicaid, or other offices that oversee my public benefits?**

Yes, until further notice, continue reporting all income changes to these offices. We will update this page if new information becomes available.

## **Will Unemployment Insurance payments make me lose benefits like SSI, Social Security, and Medicaid?**

Any amount of unemployment benefits you receive, state or federal, will not impact your eligibility for or the amount you receive in Social Security Disability Insurance, Disabled

Widower's Benefits, Childhood Disability Benefits, and Social Security Retirement Benefits.

For SSI Beneficiaries:

If you receive federal or state unemployment benefits, Social Security will count this as unearned income. This means that receiving unemployment benefits at this time will likely cause your SSI benefits to be reduced or suspended while you are receiving unemployment benefit payments. Once you stop receiving unemployment benefits, you should notify Social Security immediately. This will allow Social Security to return your SSI payments to the amount they were before you received unemployment benefits.

For Medicaid recipients:

Louisiana Medicaid released a memorandum on 4/20/20, stating that the agency will disregard any federal unemployment benefits you receive during the COVID-19 pandemic. However, it is possible that state unemployment benefits, in combination with other income you receive, could potentially impact your income eligibility for Medicaid, depending on the monthly income limits of the Medicaid program you are covered under.

**Can I still get approved for Unemployment Insurance if I disclose that I have a disability and receive SSI or Social Security disability benefits?**

As long as you meet the other requirements for Unemployment Insurance, your disability status and eligibility for SSI or other Social Security disability benefits should not impact the decision to approve or deny your Unemployment Insurance claim.

Keep in mind, SSI recipients are required to apply for any other benefit they may be eligible to receive when told of potential eligibility.

**What if my Unemployment claim is denied?**

If your application for Unemployment is denied and you disagree with Louisiana Workforce Commission's decision, you can appeal within 15 calendar days of the determination's mail date. Instructions for filing an appeal should be detailed in the decision notice. There are four ways to file an appeal:

1. Online at [www.louisianaworks.net/HIRE](http://www.louisianaworks.net/HIRE);
2. Email - [clerkappeal@lwc.la.gov](mailto:clerkappeal@lwc.la.gov);
3. Postal mail - LWC Appeals Unit, PO. Box 94094, Baton Rouge, LA 70804-9094; or
4. Fax the appeals to 225-346-6077

If you need assistance with your appeal, contact South Louisiana Legal Services at 1-844-244-7871.

**For more information on Unemployment Insurance during the COVID-19 pandemic, please visit the following:**

[http://www.laworks.net/FAQs/FAQ\\_COVID-19\\_QandA.asp#answer\\_2](http://www.laworks.net/FAQs/FAQ_COVID-19_QandA.asp#answer_2);

[http://www.laworks.net/Downloads/PR/COVID\\_19\\_Information.pdf](http://www.laworks.net/Downloads/PR/COVID_19_Information.pdf);

<http://www.laworks.net/Downloads/UI/UIBenefitRightsInformation.pdf>; and

<https://www.dol.gov/coronavirus/unemployment-insurance>

## **Social Security**

### **How can I get in touch with the Social Security Administration?**

All local Social Security offices will be closed to the public for in-person services during this time. However, they are still able to provide critical services. If you need Social Security assistance, please call 1-800-772-1213 or visit <https://www.ssa.gov/onlineservices/>. You can also contact your local Social Security office directly. To locate your local Social Security office phone number, click the following link and type in your zip code: <https://secure.ssa.gov/ICON/main.jsp>.

### **What should I do if Social Security was in the process of reviewing my case if I had a deadline to give information to Social Security?**

Social Security is extending the time limits for submitting appeals and taking other actions because of COVID-19. You can contact Social Security once their offices reopen, or you can mail your documents to your local Social Security office and they will follow-up with you. Write down the dates and times that you try to get in touch with Social Security and write down the names of the Social Security representatives you speak with. Always make copies of any documents you mail to Social Security.

### **Can I apply for Social Security disability benefits and SSI while the local offices are closed?**

Yes, you can still apply online using the following link: <https://secure.ssa.gov/iClaim/dib>.

You can also apply over the phone by calling the national number at 1-800-772-1213 or by calling your local office. To locate your local office phone number, click the following link and type in your zip code: <https://secure.ssa.gov/ICON/main.jsp>.

**For more information on the Social Security Administration's operations during the COVID-19 pandemic, please visit the following:**

<https://www.ssa.gov/coronavirus/>; and

<https://www.ssa.gov/agency/emergency/>

## **Medicaid**

### **How do I get in touch with Medicaid?**

All Louisiana Medicaid offices are closed to the public until further notice. You can reach Medicaid by calling 1-888-342-6207 or find more information online at [www.medicaid.la.gov](http://www.medicaid.la.gov).

### **I have a disability and am being denied coverage for certain medical services or I am getting less in-home care that's covered by Medicaid. What can I do?**

Call Disability Rights Louisiana at 800-960-7705.

### **I lost my job and don't have health insurance. Can I apply for Medicaid?**

If you have been laid off from work or your hours have been reduced, you MAY be eligible for Medicaid. You can apply for Medicaid by calling 1-888-342-6207 or online at <https://sspweb.lameds.ldh.la.gov/selfservice/>

## **Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program ("SNAP" or "food stamps")**

### **I already get SNAP benefits, will they continue?**

If you are already receiving SNAP benefits, you MAY see an increase to your benefits. These additional funds will be automatically added to your EBT card. You do not need to apply for additional benefits. If you are already receiving the maximum amount, you will not receive additional benefits.

### **I got a letter from the Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) saying they are reviewing my case, and I need to do an interview or reapply. What do I do?**

If SNAP was conducting a review to see if you were still eligible for SNAP benefits, then your review has been put on hold, and your benefits should continue. You don't need to reapply or do an interview at this time. DCFS will contact you when it's time to reapply.

### **I did not have SNAP benefits before, but I need them now. Can I still apply?**

If you aren't already receiving SNAP benefits, you can apply now, using the following methods:

- Start your application online at [www.dcfs.la.gov/apply](http://www.dcfs.la.gov/apply). If you have difficulty with the online application, call DCFS at 1-888-524-3578 or email them at LAHelpU.DCFS@la.gov.
- Apply by telephone by calling 1-888-524-3578; or



- Complete a paper application and, after making copies for yourself, mail the application and all needed documentation to DCFS Economic Stability PO. Box 260031 Baton Rouge, LA 70826 or fax it to (225) 663-3164. If you cannot print the paper application, call 1-888-524-3578 and request they mail you a copy; otherwise, you can download and print the paper application here: <http://www.dcfslouisiana.gov/assets/docs/searchable/EconomicStability/Applications/OFS%20English%20Combined.pdf>.

Providing the following information will help DCFS expedite your application: a separation notice from your employer or contact information for your employer; proof of separation (last day work or date of last paycheck); proof of income (i.e. pay stub); proof of identity (i.e. copy of Driver's License); and proof of residency (i.e. copy of La. driver's license, utility bill, rental receipt)

If you exhaust all of these application methods and still are not able to submit your application, call Southeast Louisiana Legal Services COVID-19 Hotline at 1-844-244-7871 to apply for free legal help.

Keep in mind that DCFS is not offering Disaster-SNAP, so you still need to meet strict eligibility guidelines and provide all required documents.

**For more information on SNAP benefits during the COVID-19 pandemic, please visit the following:**

<http://www.dcfslouisiana.gov/page/snap-covid19-response-faqs>; and

<https://slls.org/snap/?fbclid=IwAR0vfuqZN7ScVKRxx-qS73OPYADlupbKU3vlllwzOLRcaV5sJpGSB5epV00>.

## **Websites and Phone Numbers**

Department of Children & Family Services (for SNAP or Food Stamp claims)  
[www.dcfslouisiana.gov](http://www.dcfslouisiana.gov) or 1-888-524-3578

Disability Rights Louisiana  
[www.disabilityrightsla.org](http://www.disabilityrightsla.org) or 1-800-960-7705

Louisiana Medicaid  
[www.medicaid.la.gov](http://www.medicaid.la.gov) or 1-888-342-6207

Louisiana Workforce Commission (for Unemployment Insurance claims)  
[www.louisianaworks.net/hire](http://www.louisianaworks.net/hire) or 1-866-783-5567

Social Security Administration  
[www.ssa.gov](http://www.ssa.gov) or 1-800-772-1213

## **How Disability Rights Louisiana Can Help**

Disability Rights Louisiana (DRLA) is a non-profit organization that provides legal and non-legal help to people with disabilities in Louisiana.

We may be able to assist you with disability-related issues you facing are because of COVID-19. You can find more information about DRLA and its services here: <https://disabilityrightsla.org/>.

Some of our programs allow us to work directly with certain people on addressing some of the COVID-19 and benefits-related concerns discussed in this document. These include the following:

The Work Incentives Planning & Assistance (WIPA) program works with people who are currently receiving Social Security disability benefits or SSI and who are currently working, want to work, or were working and were laid off as a result of COVID-19. WIPA staff can help eligible people understand how different kinds of income impact their public benefits. More information about WIPA can be found here: <https://disabilityrightsla.org/how-we-can-help/wipa-work-incentives-planning-assistance/>. If you are eligible for and interested in WIPA, call Monique at 855-877-8599.

The Financial Access Inclusion & Resources (FAIR) program works with people who have disabilities, who have been released from incarceration in the last ten years, who want to work, and who live in Orleans or Jefferson Parish. FAIR staff can help people address barriers to employment and financial security by helping with things like applying for public benefits, setting up bank accounts, understanding how different kinds of income impact public benefits, applying for jobs and learning how to manage bills. More information about FAIR can be found here: <https://disabilityrightsla.org/how-we-can-help/fair/> if you are eligible for FAIR call Libby at 504-613-4535.