



## 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. This document was most recently updated on April 6, 2020.

### Stimulus Checks

**Will I get a stimulus payment?** If you filed federal income taxes in 2018 or 2019 and your gross income was less than \$75,000 as a single person or less than \$150,000 as a couple, you should automatically be found eligible for the full payment. The full stimulus payment is \$1,200 for individuals and \$2,400 for couples. Parents are eligible to get an additional \$500 for each qualifying child.

**How will the IRS send my stimulus payment if I filed my taxes in 2018 or 2019?** If you used direct deposit when you filed your taxes, the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) would send your stimulus payment to the same bank account that you used when you filed. Otherwise, you will get a paper check in the mail.

**What if I was supposed to file taxes, but haven't for 2018 and 2019, will I still get a stimulus payment?** If you are in this situation, the IRS is asking that you file your taxes as soon as possible so that you can get your stimulus payment. You should include direct deposit banking information on the return.

For those concerned about visiting a tax professional or local community organization in person to get help with a tax return, the stimulus payments will be available throughout the rest of 2020.

**What if I did not have to file a tax return because I did not make enough money or because I get Social Security disability benefits, Veterans Administration (VA) benefits, or Supplemental Security Income (SSI)? Will I still automatically get a stimulus payment?** If you get Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI), Social Security Retirement, Childhood Disability Benefits, Disabled Widowers Benefits, or Railroad Retirement Benefits, you may not need to do anything. The IRS will use the information on certain Social Security tax forms to identify when someone is eligible and where to send the payment. However, since the IRS would not have information about any dependents for these people, each person would receive \$1,200 per person, without the additional amount for any dependents at this time.

The Social Security Administration, the IRS, and the Treasury are still working to determine how to make stimulus payments to SSI and VA beneficiaries who do not typically have to file taxes and who do not typically receive Social Security tax forms. We are awaiting guidance for this particular population. In the meantime, these individuals may opt to file taxes. We will update this document with further guidance on this topic as soon as possible.

**What if the IRS does not have my most up-to-date direct deposit**

**information?** Soon, the IRS plans to open an online portal for people to provide their banking information. We will update this page with information about this portal once it is available. If the IRS does not have your banking information, they will likely mail you a paper check.

**What if I get SSI, Medicaid, or other benefits because I'm low-income or have a disability? Will the stimulus 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, 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 stimulus 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 stimulus 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>; and  
<https://www.ssa.gov/coronavirus/>

## **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**.

If you make 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?** Under the newly signed federal act, in response to the COVID-19 crisis, people who might not usually be eligible for Unemployment Insurance may now be found eligible. Each case is reviewed separately. You MAY be eligible for unemployment if the any of the following situations apply to you:

1. Your work hours have been reduced because of COVID-19.
2. Your workplace closes temporarily because of COVID-19 and you are not being paid.
3. You have been told not to go to work because of COVID-19 and you are not being paid while at home.
4. You were employed between the years 2018 and 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?** 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 handy: Social Security Number; home and mailing addresses; telephone number; email address; bank account and routing numbers for direct deposit; names, addresses, and phone numbers of employers you worked for from 2018 to present; first and last day you worked with these employers; hours worked and pay rate of jobs worked; 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. The federal government will pay an additional \$600 per week in Unemployment Insurance benefits 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 week 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 SNAP, SSI, Social Security, and Medicaid?**

Social Security Disability Insurance, Disabled Widower's Benefits, Childhood Disability Benefits, and Social Security Retirement Benefits will not be impacted by any amount of Unemployment Insurance.

For SSI, SNAP, Medicaid and other means-tested benefits:

Under typical circumstances Unemployment Insurance payments could impact these benefits. However, the agencies that administer these benefits have not released policies on how they will treat Unemployment Insurance income received by individuals due to COVID-19. We will update this page as this information becomes available.

**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 you getting approving or denied for 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.

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

**following:** [http://www.laworks.net/Downloads/PR/COVID\\_19\\_Information.pdf](http://www.laworks.net/Downloads/PR/COVID_19_Information.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 online at <https://www.ssa.gov/online/services/>. You can also contact your local Social Security office directly. To locate your local 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. As always, write down the dates and times that you try to get in touch with Social Security and write down the names of Social Security representatives you speak to. 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 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 Medicaid 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://sspsweb.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 April 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 will 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 online at [www.dcfslouisiana.gov/apply](http://www.dcfslouisiana.gov/apply) or by calling 1-888-524-3578. Keep in mind that DCFS is not offering Disaster-SNAP, so you still need to meet strict eligibility guidelines and provide all needed 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>

## **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 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 10 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.