



## Employment Security Department

WASHINGTON STATE

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Dear Washington State Employers,

During these unprecedented times, we know that you are doing everything you possibly can to support your employees. That's why we are reaching out to offer our help, if needed, as well as ask for your help with our efforts.

Note – if you are a sole-proprietor or self-employed worker impacted by COVID-19, you may be eligible for the [new expanded unemployment assistance benefits](#) enabled by the Federal CARES Act. The steps below will help you prepare to apply for these benefits.

First – thank you for your part in helping Washington state flatten the curve! Whether you are enabling your employees to stay home and stay healthy or whether yours is an essential business and you've identified how you can provide safe social distancing – your business transformation to prioritize the health of Washingtonians during these historic times is deeply appreciated!

Fundamentally, I hope you and your employees don't need our Unemployment Insurance services. But if you do, this email provides you with some key steps to take before you lay off or reduce the hours of your staff. With these materials in hand, you will be able to equip your employees with the tools they need to best navigate our Unemployment Insurance system. We have found that the better prepared applicants are, the faster they obtain their benefits.

The enormous demand for our services has led to a 1,000% increase in call volumes and, unfortunately, significant wait times (which we are working to address). Of those calls, approximately 60% are questions that are answered on our website. At the same time, many people have been able to successfully apply - mostly online - and then receive their benefits within 7-10 days after their application is approved. (If they sign up for direct deposit, they can get benefits within 48 hours!)

We want to help you help your staff have a smoother application process so that they can get their benefits more quickly and have a more satisfying experience. This, in turn, will help us reduce call volumes so that our claims staff can focus on more complex customer needs.

### Key steps to take right now to support your workers

1. **Consider SharedWork:** If you are able to reduce staff hours rather than laying people off, we highly recommend considering SharedWork. This program allows you to reduce staff hours 10-50% and have Unemployment Insurance provide partial wage replacement against those reduced hours. [You can learn more and apply here.](#) In addition to the Unemployment Insurance weekly benefit, those staff members will be able to receive the additional \$600 weekly benefit provided by the federal CARES Act through the end of July. Additionally, the CARES Act covers 100% of the costs so it won't impact your experience rating.

2. **Prepare your staff for the process:** [Here is a resource center](#) where you'll find a template letter for you to use to send to your employees, webinar sign-up information and other tools for your employees you intend to lay off due to COVID-19. This will provide guidance on how they can best prepare to apply and give you a vehicle to answer company specific questions. If you are a larger employer with more than 250 impacted employees and need help customizing your message and frequently asked questions, please contact us for assistance at [ESDGPBusinessAssistance@esd.wa.gov](mailto:ESDGPBusinessAssistance@esd.wa.gov).
3. **Emphasize these four steps:** At a minimum, we recommend sharing these four action steps with your staff, especially with the upcoming rollout of the federal CARES Act. We recommend everyone do these right now, before they apply:
  4. **Please sign up for ESD's COVID-19 action alerts.** You can do so on the agency's COVID page ([esd.wa.gov/newsroom/covid-19](https://esd.wa.gov/newsroom/covid-19)). We send out updated information and instructions through this channel.
  5. **Check your eligibility.** Learn more about your eligibility and when to apply for benefits using [this eligibility checker](#). We encourage those eligible for regular unemployment to apply now, and newly eligible to wait until after April 18.
  6. **Get ready to apply.** [Download the application checklist](#).
  7. **Set up your account.** [Watch the tutorial video to set up your account correctly](#). It is nine minutes long but will likely save a lot of time.

**Come up to speed:** Go to [ESD.WA.GOV](https://ESD.WA.GOV) and check out our [COVID-19 information section](#). There, you'll find FAQs for employees and businesses, preparation checklists and more.

The more questions you can answer for your employees related to your particular business, the more successful they will be. Do what you can to help your employees take their time and prepare themselves before filing for unemployment. You will also find the most current information related to experience ratings and other updates for employers.

Thank you for helping us support your team!

Warm Regards,

Suzi LeVine  
Commissioner, the Employment Security Department  
*Please follow me @ESDCommish*