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Frequently Asked Questions and Helpful Tips for Filing for Unemployment Insurance Benefits in California

Why is it so hard to call the California Employment Development Department (EDD) and file for Unemployment Insurance (UI) benefits?

In California, and across the country, unemployment has risen sharply due to the current recession and created an increased demand for UI benefits. The number of people filing for benefits has increased at least 80 percent from the same time last year and the number of calls coming into EDD's UI call centers has doubled. Adding to the demand is the federal extension of UI benefits that EDD must also process; and the shortened holiday weeks.

What is EDD doing to deal with the increased demand?

To maintain the Department's priority of issuing UI benefit checks in a timely manner, EDD staff are working overtime after hours and on weekends to help keep up with demand. The Department has directed as much staff as possible to the phones during peak times but there are other aspects of the UI program that must be attended to in order to avoid further congestion at the call centers. With the unprecedented demand on the UI call centers, claims are automatically being backdated for people who describe difficulty in getting through the phone lines to file claims. EDD is also adding more staff as quickly as training and funding will allow.

What's the best way to file a UI claim?

File for UI benefits immediately following separation from work, even if you receive what's often referred to as severance pay. The fastest and most convenient way to file a claim for UI benefits is online at www.edd.ca.gov. The same application is used for a regular UI benefits claim and, if you have exhausted your regular UI benefits, for a federal extension claim. If you do not have a computer, try accessing one at your local library, a One-Stop Career Center (employment office), or through a friend or neighbor. You can find your nearest One-Stop Career Center on EDD's Web site or by calling 1-877-872-5627 (TTY: 1-877889-5627).

What information is needed to file a UI claim?

- List of all the names and Social Security numbers used while working
- Last employer's name and address
- Reason you are no longer working for your last employer
- Last day of work with that employer

What happens after my UI claim is filed?

- Once your claim has been filed, you will receive your claim materials, including a bi-weekly claim form, by mail within 10 days of EDD processing your claim. Claims are processed the week in which they are filed.
- Barring any eligibility issues and provided that claim forms are accurately completed and returned to EDD by the date as instructed, your first UI benefit check should arrive within about three weeks following the filing of your claim.
- If further information is required to determine your eligibility for benefits, you will be notified by mail within 10 days of EDD processing your claim of a scheduled telephone eligibility interview. Be sure to keep that appointment or follow the instructions given for rescheduling.
- Any additional requests for information should be completed and promptly returned to the Department.

What if I cannot access a computer?

EDD operates six call centers throughout the State that can be reached through one of six toll-free numbers:

- English: 1-800-300-5616
- Spanish: 1-800-326-8937
- Cantonese: 1-800-547-3506
- Mandarin: 1-866-303-0706
- Vietnamese: 1-800-547-2058
- TTY (non-voice): 1-800-815-9387

Due to the high call volume, phone lines will be busy. Be patient. Try calling later in the week since Mondays are the busiest days, and use your phone at home. Phones available in the statewide One-Stop Career Centers do not provide special access to the UI call centers.

What can I do to ensure prompt processing?

- Complete claim forms accurately before sending them to EDD for payment. Up to 30 percent of forms are not completed correctly (for instance, a question was skipped or an X was used instead of filling in a circle) and that can delay payment.
- Use blue or black ink to complete the claim form. Anything else could interrupt processing.
- Report all wages earned whether or not you have already received them.
- Mail all forms to EDD according to the instructions and use the envelope or address information provided.

If I earn any wages while collecting unemployment insurance, how will that affect my benefits?

Some unemployed workers may find opportunities for odd jobs, temporary work assignments, or part-time work while collecting Unemployment Insurance (UI) benefits. If you were not fully-employed during the week in which you worked, you may be able to receive reduced UI benefits even if your earnings are higher than your weekly benefit amount as long as you meet all other eligibility criteria.

You must report any wages on your claim forms for the week in which you earned the wages, even if you weren't paid for that work until later. Your gross wages are required (total without the payroll deductions) and the EDD will figure the amount of wages to deduct from your weekly benefit amount. A total of \$25 or 25 percent of those earnings, whichever is higher, is not considered deductible from your benefits. Any wages beyond that will be deducted from your weekly benefit amount and you will be paid the difference, if any.

If you earn too much money in a week to receive any UI benefits, the UI benefits remain in your claim to collect at a later time during the benefit year of your claim as long as you remain unemployed and eligible. If you accept full-time work for two weeks or longer, your claim will become inactive and no additional claim forms will be mailed. If you become unemployed again, you must submit a new application for benefits. The easiest way to do so is to submit your application online through EDD's Web site at www.edd.ca.gov.

What if I have questions other than those pertaining to claim filing?

- The most commonly asked question is "Where's my check?" You can inquire about the status of your check without talking to a service representative by calling the 1-800 number. The best time to call is after 5 p.m. and on weekends.
- You can submit questions about your claim online through the "Contact EDD" feature at the bottom of EDD's home page at www.edd.ca.gov.
- Frequently Asked Questions about the UI program are also available on EDD's Web site.