

Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act (CARES Act): NBDCI Questions & Answers about the Stimulus

The National Black Child Development Institute (NBDCI) would like to commend our national leaders on the recent passage of the historic Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act, or CARES Act. The legislation includes significant relief throughout the package for the nation's child care industry, which has been hit with widespread layoffs and closures as a result of catastrophic drops in enrollment, as well as direct support to states and families who are grappling with the child care realities of this pandemic. NBDCI has compiled a Q&A regarding stimulus payments and unemployment benefits covered under the CARES Act to help answer common questions resulting from the stimulus bill.

Stimulus Payments

How much would the payments be?

Most adults would get \$1,200, although some would get less. For every child age 16 or under, the payment would be an additional \$500.

How many payments would there be?

Just one. Future bills could order up additional payments, though.

How do I know if I will get the full amount?

It depends on your income. Single adults with Social Security numbers who are United States residents and have an adjusted gross income of \$75,000 or less would get the full amount. Married couples with no children earning \$150,000 or less would receive a total of \$2,400. And someone filing as head of household will get the full payment if they earn \$112,500 or less.

Above those income figures, the payment decreases until it stops altogether for single people earning \$99,000 or married people earning \$198,000.

In any given family and in most instances, everyone must have a valid Social Security number. There is an exception for members of the military.

You can find your adjusted gross income on line 8b of the 2019 1040 federal tax return.

What year's income should I be looking at?

2019. If you haven't prepared a tax return yet, you can use your 2018 return. If you haven't filed that yet, you can use a 2019 Social Security statement showing your income.

What if my recent income made me ineligible, but I anticipate being eligible because of a loss of income in 2020? Do I get a payment?

The bill does not help people in that circumstance, but there are many other provisions in the legislation. You may be able to file for unemployment or for one of the new loans for small business owners or sole proprietors.

Would I have to apply to receive a payment?

No. If the Internal Revenue Service already has your bank account information, it would transfer the money to you via direct deposit based on the recent income-tax figures it already has.

When would the payment arrive?

The Treasury Secretary has stated that he expected most people to get their payments within three weeks.

If my payment doesn't come soon, how can I be sure that it wasn't misdirected?

According to the bill, you would get a paper notice in the mail no later than a few weeks after your payment has been disbursed. That notice would contain information about where the payment ended up and in what form it was made. If you couldn't locate the payment at that point, it would be time to contact the IRS using the information on the notice.

What if I haven't filed tax returns recently, would that affect my ability to receive a payment?

It could. File a return immediately, at least for 2018, according to the IRS website. "Those without 2018 tax filings on record could potentially affect mailings of stimulus checks," the site says.

If you're worried about money that you owe that you cannot pay, the IRS recommends consulting a tax professional who can help you request an alternative payment plan or some other resolution.

Would most people who are receiving Social Security retirement and disability payments each month also get a stimulus payment?

Yes.

Would eligible unemployed people get these stimulus payments? Veterans?

Yes, and yes

If my income tax refunds are currently being garnished because of a student loan default, would this payment be garnished as well?

No.

Unemployment Benefits

Who would be covered by the expanded program?

The bill would wrap in far more workers than are usually eligible for unemployment benefits, including self-employed people and part-time workers. Those who are unemployed, partially unemployed or who cannot work for a wide variety of coronavirus-related reasons would be more likely to receive benefits.

How much would I receive?

It depends on your state.

Benefits would be expanded to replace the average worker's paycheck. The average worker earns about \$1,000 a week, and unemployment benefits often replace roughly 40 to 45 percent of that. The expansion would pay an extra amount to fill the gap.

Under the Bill, eligible workers would get an extra \$600 per week on top of their state benefit. But some states are more generous than others. According to the Century Foundation, the maximum weekly benefit in Alabama is \$265, but it's \$450 in California and \$681 in New Jersey.

So, let's say a worker was making \$1,100 per week in New York; she'd be eligible for the maximum state unemployment benefit of \$435 per week. Under the new program, she gets an additional \$600 of federal pandemic unemployment compensation, for a total of \$1,035, or nearly all of her original paycheck.

States have the option of providing the entire amount in one payment or sending the extra portion separately. But it must all be done on the same weekly basis.

Are gig workers, freelancers and independent contractors covered in the bill?

Yes, self-employed people would be newly eligible for unemployment benefits.

Benefit amounts would be calculated based on previous income, using a formula from the Disaster Unemployment Assistance program.

Self-employed workers would also be eligible for the additional \$600 weekly benefit provided by the federal government.

What if I'm a part-time worker who lost their job because of a coronavirus reason, but my state doesn't cover part-time workers? Would I still be eligible?

Yes. Part-time workers would be eligible for benefits, but the benefit amount and how long benefits would last depend on your state. They would also be eligible for the additional \$600 weekly benefit.

What if I've been diagnosed with Covid-19 or I need to care for a family member who has?

If you've been diagnosed, are experiencing symptoms or are seeking a diagnosis and you're unemployed, partially unemployed or cannot work as a result you would be covered. The same goes if you must care for a member of your family or household who has received a diagnosis.

What if my child's school or day care shut down?

If you rely on a school, day care or another facility to care for a child, elderly parent or another household member so that you can work and that facility has been shut down because of coronavirus you would be eligible.

What if I've been advised by a health care provider to quarantine myself because of exposure to coronavirus? And what about broader orders to stay home?

People who must self-quarantine would be covered. The legislation also says that individuals who are unable to get to work because of a quarantine imposed as a result of the outbreak would also be eligible.

I was about to start a new job and now can't get there because of an outbreak.

You'd be eligible for benefits. You would also be covered if you were immediately laid off from a new job and did not have sufficient work history to qualify for benefits under normal circumstances.

I had to quit my job as a direct result of coronavirus. Would I be eligible to apply for benefits?

It depends. Let's say your employer didn't lay you off but you had to quit because of a quarantine recommended by a health care provider, or because your child's day care closed and you're the primary caregiver. Situations like that are covered.

But this provision wasn't intended to cover people who quit (or want to quit) because they fear that continuing to work puts them at risk of contracting coronavirus.

My employer shut down my workplace because of coronavirus. Would I be eligible?

Yes. If you are unemployed, partially unemployed or unable to work because your employer closed down, you would be covered under the bill.

The breadwinner of my household has died as a result of coronavirus. I relied on that person for income, and I'm not working. Would that be covered?

Yes.

How long would the broader program last?

Workers who are able to work from home, and those receiving paid sick leave or paid family leave would not be covered. New entrants to the workforce who cannot find jobs would also be ineligible.

How long would the payments last?

Many states already provide 26 weeks of benefits, though some states have trimmed that back while others provide a sliding scale tied to unemployment levels.

The bill would provide all eligible workers with an additional 13 weeks. So, participants in states with 26 weeks would be eligible for a total of 39 weeks. The total amount cannot exceed 39 weeks, but it may be shorter in certain states.

The extra \$600 payment would last for up to four months, covering weeks of unemployment ending July 31.

Who would the bill leave out?

Expanded coverage would be available to workers who were newly eligible for unemployment benefits for weeks starting on Jan. 27, 2020 and through Dec. 31, 2020.

My unemployment recently ran out could I sign up again?

Yes. If you've exhausted your benefits, eligible workers could generally reapply. But how much you would get and for how long would depend on the state where you worked. Everyone would get at least another 13 weeks, along with the extra \$600 payment.

Would this income disqualify me from any other programs?

Maybe. The additional \$600 benefit would count as income when determining eligibility for means-tested programs, except for Medicaid and the Children's Health Insurance Program, known as CHIP.

How long would I need to wait for benefits?

States have been incentivized to waive the one-week waiting period, but it's unclear how long it would take to process claims, especially with state offices so strained by a flood of claims.