

Unemployment Benefits

Both Oregon and Washington have expanded unemployment insurance benefits in connection with COVID-19. Both states have issued charts to help employers and employees identify available benefits:

- Oregon: https://www.oregon.gov/employ/Documents/EDPUB190_0320.pdf
- Washington:
<https://esdorchardstorage.blob.core.windows.net/esdwa/Default/ESDWAGOV/newsroom/COVID-19/covid-19-scenarios-and-benefits.pdf>

Oregon: Oregon has expanded the eligibility for unemployment benefits to respond COVID-19. A person can receive unemployment benefits for a “COVID-19 related situation,” which includes the following: a) a person is unable to work because they are sick with the virus; b) a person is quarantined due to exposure to the virus; c) a person has been advised by a health care provider to self-quarantine; d) a person’s employer has ceased or curtailed operations due to COVID-19; e) a person must care for a family member who is ill with the virus or is quarantined; f) a person cannot work because they must care for a child home from school due to a virus-related closure; and g) a person is being asked to work in violation of mandatory quarantine or the Governor’s directive to limit activities. The State has also reduced disqualifying conditions, allowing people to receive benefits if they were terminated or quit for a COVID-19 related reason, and reducing the requirements to apply for and accept work. Finally, the rules on actively seeking work and being available for work have been relaxed. If the employee and the employer intend the employee to resume work, the employee is not required to be actively seeking work.

Washington: Washington has made similar changes to its unemployment benefits as Oregon. Unemployment that results from COVID-19, including quarantines, temporary shut downs is likely to entitle a worker for benefits, including unemployment as a result of layoff or temporary layoff. Employees who have had their hours reduced as a result of COVID-19 can apply for standby process, which streamlines the application process. Washington is not offering unemployment benefits due to school closures. Washington also expanded its unemployment benefits to include some part-time workers.

Both Oregon and Washington have programs, developed during the financial crisis, where employees’ hours can be reduced while they remain employed and the employees can receive unemployment benefits for the portion of their hours that they have lost. Oregon’s program is entitled WorkShare and Washington’s is SharedWork. These may prove to be valuable programs to help employers retain valuable employees during this crisis.