



**VIOLENCE FREE**  
**MINNESOTA**  
THE COALITION TO END RELATIONSHIP ABUSE

# COVID-19 Minnesota Resource Guide

*(Updated March 25, 2020)*

## Overview

COVID-19, and the emergency response to contain the virus, is severely impacting the physical health, mental health, and financial security of Minnesota residents, with particularly vulnerable community members experiencing heightened affects. There are many programs, at the federal, state, local, and non-profit levels that are either being modified or created to assist. However, with so much information and changes happening so rapidly it can be hard to track what resources are available and what modifications to existing programs have been made. This goal of this resource is to provide a centralized source of information about available resources and program changes. It is certainly not an exhaustive list, but we hope it is a helpful starting point to access information about assistance in Minnesota.

Every county may vary slightly in how they handle the logistics of processing benefits programs and communicating with community members. Most county offices at this time are closed to the public and are asking community members to apply for benefits online and to reach out with questions. This can be frustrating due to sometimes long phone wait times, and prohibitive for those who do not have access to a compute or internet. There is some information below that addresses free internet access, but for those without computers, the assistance of an advocate or other community member (if either are available) will be needed in many cases.

Due to the emergency nature of the COVID-19 response changes to programs are being made at an extremely rapid pace, often changing by the day or hour. Violence Free Minnesota will continually update this resource. However, if you would like to receive real-time updates directly from the Department of Human Services regarding benefits programs you can sign up for DHS email updates at [here](#). Also, Minnesota currently has two hotlines available to answer COVID-19 specific questions. The first is the Community Mitigation Line to address any school, childcare, or business question (1-800-657-3504) and the second is a line dedicated to health-related questions (1-800-657-3909).

## I. Unemployment Benefits, Paid Sick Leave & FMLA

### Unemployment Benefits:

On March 16, 2020, Minnesota Governor Tim Walz issued an executive modifying Minnesota's unemployment benefits program and eligibility in light of the health emergency. The executive order makes applicants eligible for unemployment benefits if:

- A healthcare professional or health authority recommended or ordered them to avoid contact with others.
- They have been ordered not to come to their workplace due to an outbreak of a communicable disease.
- They have received notification from a school district, daycare, or other childcare provider that either classes are canceled or the applicant's ordinary childcare is unavailable, provided that the applicant made reasonable effort



## VIOLENCE FREE MINNESOTA

THE COALITION TO END RELATIONSHIP ABUSE

to obtain other childcare and requested time off or other accommodation from the employer and no reasonable accommodation was available.

- **Note:** If none of the situations above apply, but an individual's employer, as a result of the health emergency, reduced an employee's hours/rate of pay or temporarily/permanently laid off the employee, the employee may potentially be eligible for unemployment benefits.

Governor Walz's executive order also waived the nonpayable or "waiting" week to ensure applicants have access to unemployment benefits as quickly as possible. Under the executive order, the normal requirement that applicants for unemployment benefits must actively seek work still applies. However, the order states that the applicant can meet the requirement by looking for suitable work that does not pose a health risk to themselves or others. Also, the order makes clear that applicants who have been laid off temporarily by their employer can meet the work search requirements by staying in contact with their current employer.

The information above is located on the Minnesota Unemployment Insurance website ([available here](#)) along with more information about how to apply (the Department is asking that applications be completed online) and how to reach out for questions.

### Sick Leave/Family Medical Leave Act (FMLA)

The Families First Coronavirus Response Act provided new rules and benefits around sick leave and the FMLA. FMLA benefits now apply to employees who work for any entity with less than 500 employees. Employees must have been employed with the entity for at least 30 days from the start of the leave. Emergency FMLA now applies to employees who cannot work or telework because they are caring for a child (under 18 years of age) as a result of the child's school or childcare provider being unavailable due to COVID-19. The first 10 days of leave can be unpaid, but for the remainder of the leave a employee must generally be paid at a rate of two-thirds the regular rate of pay the employee would receive for the amount of hours they would otherwise be scheduled for. There are certain caps for these payments, and different formulas for calculating pay apply to part-time employees.

For paid sick leave several COVID-19 related grounds for eligibility were added. For instance, eligibility for paid sick leave now include, but are not limited to, those quarantined due to the illness, experiencing symptoms and seeking a diagnosis, caring for an individual who is in various quarantine or isolation circumstances as a result of the virus, or caring for a child whose school or child care provider are unavailable due to the health emergency, etc. The benefit now apply to eligible employees who work for an entity with fewer than 500 employees. The benefits entitle eligible employees to some amount of paid time off; the duration and amount of paid leave vary. For a full, detailed summary of the sick leave and FMLA changes, view full overview sheet [here](#).

## II. MFIP/DWP

**Stop –Work Verifications:** MFIP participants do not need to provide stop-work (employment) verifications.

**Waiver of Face-to-Face Meeting Requirement:** Counties and tribal partners are no longer required to conduct



## VIOLENCE FREE MINNESOTA

THE COALITION TO END RELATIONSHIP ABUSE

orientations or overviews with MFIP participants in-person, or have face-to-face meetings with participants.

**Waiver of Certain Meeting/Paperwork Requirements:** DHS has temporarily ordered that participants in the MFIP and DWP will not be sanctioned or disqualified for failing to attend meetings, submit paperwork or comply with other specific requirements. This will be in effect for the duration of the public health emergency.

**Waivers Related to Cases Involving Family Based Violence:** DHS has temporarily waived the requirement for MFIP participants who are experiencing family violence to meet with both an employment counselor and a family violence specialist if the family violence specialist cannot be reached. The commissioner also directed employment counselors to avoid requiring activities that participants indicate would be dangerous in their situation, such as face to face meetings. The Minnesota Family Investment Program requires employment plans for participants experiencing family violence to make safety the primary concern, and those plans normally must involve both an employment counselor and a family violence specialist.

\*\*For information about applying for MFIP you can visit the DHS website [here](#).

### III. SNAP

**Work Requirement Waiver:** DHS has waived the work requirement for “able-bodied adults without children” receiving SNAP.

**Note:** The FFCVRA and Minnesota State Executive Orders have authorized the Minnesota Human Service Department to request waivers of federal requirements relating to SNAP. Some waiver requests that are being requested, and could be in place in the near future, are an increase to the income cap for SNAP, extensions for various income/household reporting requirements for SNAP participants, and an expansion of participant’s ability to use SNAP benefits to purchase food from online grocers. This document will be updated if/when those, or other changes, are implemented.

**How to Apply:** For more information about how to enroll in the SNAP program you can visit the DHS website [here](#).

### IV. Medical Care, Coverage, and Insurance

**Coverage for Covid-19 Testing:** The FFCVRA provides full MA coverage for testing for COVID-19 regardless of whether the individual is insured or not.

**Access to Health Insurance (MNsure):** Starting March 23rd , and ending April 21st, there will be a 30-day special enrollment period (SEP), which will allow uninsured individuals to enroll in health insurance coverage through MNsure.org. Plans selected during the SEP period will be retroactive to April 1st. To complete an application visit MNsure.org. Click here for information about the statewide network of expert assisters (“navigators”) who can help Minnesotans apply and enroll, free of charge. The MNsure Contact Center is open between 8:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. Monday-Friday at 651-539-2099 or 855-366-7873.



## VIOLENCE FREE MINNESOTA

THE COALITION TO END RELATIONSHIP ABUSE

**Waivers/Modification for DHS Programs:** On March 20th through Executive Order the Governor gave DHS temporary authority to waive or modify certain requirements to their programs in order to ensure assistance to those in need during the health crisis.

- **Continued Enrollment:** DHS has continued enrollment in public health care programs to ensure that no one enrolled in Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP), Medical Assistance, or MinnesotaCare loses coverage during the pandemic, unless an enrollee requests that their coverage end or moves out of Minnesota. For now, the department is not sending renewal and closure notices to Minnesotans on CHIP, Medical Assistance, and MinnesotaCare.
- **Waiver of Face-to-Face Assessments:** DHS has waived several traditionally required face-to-face visits for seniors and people with disabilities receiving long-term services and supports. For people receiving home and community-based services under Medical Assistance assessments for needs can be done by phone or online connection, and that case managers can conduct phone or online visits.

## V. Transportation

**Public Transit:** Metro Transit bus and light rail services are suspended from 11 p.m. to 4:30 a.m., and as of March 25th 40% of routes are suspended, which means frequency of buses/trains will resemble holiday hours. The exception is the METRO Blue Line airport shuttle between Terminal 1 and Terminal 2, stations, which continues to operate overnight. In general, many routes are unpredictable and so it is a good idea, if you have internet access, to track your route [here](#).

Metro Mobility is still continuing services at this time, although are asking people to limit usage to essential trips if possible. If you are having issues ordering rides you can contact 651-602-1111, TTY 651-221-9886 or through email at [metromobility@metc.state.mn.us](mailto:metromobility@metc.state.mn.us).

## VI. Immigration Issues

### Public Charge Modifications:

USCIS announced that testing, preventive care, and treatment for COVID-19 will not be considered as part of the public charge inadmissibility determination. If a vaccine for COVID-19 becomes available, obtaining a vaccine will be considered preventative care, and therefore excluded from the public charge determination. [USCIS Public Charge Webpage](#)

### ICE Enforcement Modifications:

ICE announced that they are temporarily changing their enforcement priorities in light of COVID-19. The agency announced that they will temporarily "focus enforcement on public safety risks and individuals subject to mandatory detention based on criminal grounds. For those individuals who do not fall into those categories, ERO will exercise discretion to delay enforcement actions until after the crisis or utilize alternatives to detention, as appropriate." If an



## VIOLENCE FREE MINNESOTA

THE COALITION TO END RELATIONSHIP ABUSE

individual is unsure if they fall into one of these legal categories we advise obtaining a consultation from an immigration attorney, The statement also noted that “during the COVID-19 crisis, ICE will not carry out enforcement operations at or near health care facilities, such as hospitals, doctors' offices, accredited health clinics, and emergent or urgent care facilities, except in the most extraordinary of circumstances. Individuals should not avoid seeking medical care because they fear civil immigration enforcement.” [ICE COVID-19 Statement](#)

### Office/Court Closures: Immigration Courts:

United States Citizenship & Immigration Services has temporarily suspending all in-person appointments such as fingerprinting, interviews, and citizenship oath ceremonies until at least April 1st. However, they are still accepting applications for affirmative filings. They have also modified certain signature requirements for filings. If you are working with a participant who is entitled to a benefit (i.e. DACA, U Visa, VAWA, I-751 lifting of conditions on a greencard based on abuse or divorce, etc.) or has an immigration case with a pending deadline please have them consult an immigration attorney to make sure their case is filed before filing deadlines.

On March 18<sup>th</sup> the Immigration courts announced that they would be suspending hearings for non-detained individuals in removal proceedings whose hearing were scheduled between March 18<sup>th</sup> and April 10<sup>th</sup>. However, in Minnesota hearings for detained individuals in removal proceedings are moving forward. It is our understanding that at this time attorneys are not being allowed into jail facilities where ICE detainees are being held. Attorneys who are representing a particular detained client are able to have limited contact via phone and/or video conference with thier client. However, groups of attorneys who generally were allowed into several local jail facilities to meet with unrepresented detainees for general legal advice and screening are not being allowed access to facilities at this time. There are several lawsuits and advocacy efforts moving forward to have detained immigrants released from detention while their cases are pending due to the health risks of living in a group detention facility during this health emergency. While those efforts are pending there is great concern for the health of ICE detainees. If you are working with a survivor, or know of an individual in the community, who has underlying health or is in another category that makes puts them at increased health risk for COVID-19, please contact Anne Applebaum at Violence Free Minnesota to try to link that individual with immigration attorneys who are attempting to identify and advocate for such individuals.

There are concerns in the community that landlords, employers, and others may use this health emergency to exploit immigrants, particularly undocumented immigrants. We are not hearing reports at this time about an increase in this type of issue here in Minnesota. However, if you are working with a survivor who is facing this type of exploitation you should reach out to an counsel so that the attorney can provide an assessment of the bad actor's behavior, identify options for reporting the behavior, and also work with the survivor to gauge any potential risks of reporting (i.e. if the survivor is in a high priority ICE enforcement category, if law enforcement in the survivor's jurisdiction have policies in place barring referrals to ICE, and if the survivor has a potential remedy to fight any immigration action that could be taken against them by immigration). For some specific circumstances individuals who are extorted or otherwise harmed by a landlord or employer may be eligible for a U Visa or a T Visa. These scenarios are narrow and so a consultation with an immigration attorney is needed to obtain a full assessment.

For more information and updates on immigration services and issues see <https://cliniclegal.org/covid-19>.



**VIOLENCE FREE**  
**MINNESOTA**  
THE COALITION TO END RELATIONSHIP ABUSE

## VII. Housing: Evictions, Foreclosures, Utilities

### Foreclosures/Evictions:

**Federal:** The Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) has suspended all foreclosures and evictions through the end of April. The suspension applies to single-family homeowners with primary residences or reverse mortgages insured by the Federal Housing Administration. More clarification is needed whether HUD will also be suspending evictions for renters at HUD backed properties and in voucher programs. More information will be provided when we get clarification. View HUD announcement [here](#).

On March 18th the Federal Housing Finance Agency (FHFA) directed Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac (the Enterprises) to suspend foreclosures and evictions for at least 60 days due to the coronavirus national emergency. ***The foreclosure and eviction suspension applies to homeowners with an Enterprise-backed single-family mortgage.*** Additionally, on March 23rd, the FHFA announced protections for renters as well as homeowners. The announcement stated that the Enterprises will be offering mortgage forbearance to multifamily homeowners if the homeowner suspends evictions for renters who cannot afford their rent as a result of COVID-19.

**State:** Governor Walz issued an Executive Order, starting March 2th and lasting through the end of the peacetime emergency declaration, ordering that evictions for renters, and for homeowners following a foreclosure, be suspended during that time period. Eviction actions cannot be filed in court during that time, and leases cannot be terminated. There are extremely limited exceptions to this moratorium that mostly related to evictions where the tenant seriously endangers the safety of other residents. The order also bars execution of writs of recovery in cases where an eviction has already been ordered by a court (a writ of recovery is a notice to abandon the premises within 24 hours that is served on a tenant after an eviction hearing is lost). The order also requests (although does not order) financial institutions to immediately suspend all foreclosure proceedings and not issue fees/penalties for late mortgage payments.

The order does not stop the eviction of renters who endanger the safety of other residents. The order also does not stop a renter or homeowners' obligation to make a payment. Non-payment of rent can still result in credit issues and other collateral issues, but if rent is not paid the tenant will not be removed from their home or have an eviction filed against them at this time. View full FAQ with more information on the Executive Order [here](#).

**Minnesota Courts:** Prior to the Governor's Executive Order the Minnesota Supreme Court issued an order temporarily suspending hearings for unpaid rent and unlawful detainers until 14 days from March 16<sup>th</sup>. The only exception is for expedited eviction cases. Expedited eviction cases are evictions that are filed because a tenant causes a nuisance or does something illegal and that action creates a serious danger for other residents or property. Prior to the Governor's eviction moratorium order there were some complaints reported, that judges were not consistently following the Court's order and were moving forward with some hearings that should have been suspended. Hopefully these issues have been corrected, or will be corrected as a result of the Governor's Executive Order. However, if you are working with a survivor who is concerned that the court is not properly handling a pending eviction case, or if the survivor needs to pursue legal action against a landlord who acted illegally by locking him or her out of an apartment or turning off



## VIOLENCE FREE MINNESOTA

THE COALITION TO END RELATIONSHIP ABUSE

heat/utilities, we advise contacting your local legal aid office for guidance. More information on orders from the Minnesota Courts [here](#).

**Utilities:** Many utility companies who provide natural gas, electric, and other essential utilities in Minnesota have announced that they are making accommodations for customers who are facing financial hardship as a result of the health emergency. Some companies are suspending disconnections, extending cold-weather rules, and/or offering payment plans. Track the various different utility companies and their responses [here](#). In addition to the voluntary actions of several utility companies, some municipalities have suspended water shut-offs during the emergency. Examples of cities that have issued such orders include Minneapolis and St. Paul. Also, in general in Minnesota there is a special rule called the “cold weather rule” that, until April 15<sup>th</sup>, prevents a utility company from shutting off a tenants gas/electric utilities due to nonpayment, as long as the tenant makes and complies with a payment plan.

**Financial Assistance For Housing:** If a survivor needs assistance paying rent you may be able to get short-term emergency assistance through the county. For more information about how to apply and what resources might be available you can contact the specific county where the survivor resides.

For more information on the Governor’s eviction moratorium, court hearing suspensions, and other housing issues see <https://www.lawhelpmn.org/self-help-library/fact-sheet/covid-19-court-changes-housing-family-and-ofp-cases-during-pandemic>.

## VIII. Pet Care and Needs

**Financial Assistance for Pet Owners:** For those having financial issues providing ongoing and emergency care for their pets there are several national, as well as Minnesota specific organizations that may be able to provide free assistance. A list of organizations available [here](#).

## IX. Taxes

The federal government, as well as the State of Minnesota, have pushed the deadline for tax filings to July 15th. However, residents anticipating refund checks are encouraged to file in order to receive the payments. The IRS and Minnesota Department of Revenue will continue to produce refund checks, although there may be some delays. For more information see the IRS website [here](#) and the Minnesota Department of Revenue at [here](#).

## X. Free/Modified Internet Service

Minnesota internet providers have signed onto the FCC’s Keep America Connected Pledge. Through the pledge providers are agreeing, for the next 60 days, to: 1) to not terminate internet for residential and small business customers who



## VIOLENCE FREE MINNESOTA

THE COALITION TO END RELATIONSHIP ABUSE

cannot make payments due to issues related to the COVID-19 crisis, 2) waive any late fees that residential customers incur as a result of economic issues related to the COVID-19 crisis, and 3) open their wi-fi hot spots to anyone who needs them.

For those who do not already have internet, there are some possible options for getting short-term free internet access outside of hot spots. Comcast is offering two months of free internet to customers who sign up at this time; for more information about the terms of this offer (and to confirm that no other conditions apply) you can new customers. Also, municipalities, such as Minneapolis are offering free public wi-fi to those who need internet access. More information [here](#).

For those who do not have access to a computer (or other device to access the internet), and have children enrolled in public school many school districts are providing students/families with devices.

## XI. Access to Meals and Groceries

### Free School Lunches

School districts are continuing to provide free and reduced lunches to students. The FFCVRA included funding to states sustain this programming. School districts have different procedures for how to pick-up food. To get information for how food pick-up works in your area go your school district 'website or contact them directly.

[Example 1](#)

[Example 2](#)

### Food Banks and Food Shelves

Food banks and food shelves are also providing free food and groceries to individuals and families throughout the state. To find a food shelf in your area you can use Second Harvest Heartland's [Food Shelf Finder](#). Some county websites also have additional information about local free food programs. Please be aware that many local food shelves are operating under differently, and some are asking customers to call ahead or access directions online before coming. In order to support the continuation of these types of services the FFCVRA allocated \$400 million for TEFAP (emergency food for food banks): \$300 million in emergency food assistance and \$100 million for food storage and distribution.

### Free Food Delivery

CVS and Walgreens are not waiving charges on prescription delivery in certain cases.

Meals on Wheels is continuing to operate in Minnesota; with volunteers taking extra precautions in accordance with





## VIOLENCE FREE MINNESOTA

THE COALITION TO END RELATIONSHIP ABUSE

CDC guidance to keep customers safe. More information [here](#).

Metro Mobility, starting Sunday March 22nd, started offering free delivery of groceries and household essential for certified Metro Mobility customers. Metro Mobility Directions from Metro Mobility on how to access the services are as follows:

*You can book same day or in advance, for groceries and household essentials, just like you book a ride for yourself. You'll receive your delivery within 60 minutes. Just tell the store that Metro Mobility is picking up and provide us your order number as proof of purchase for pick up. Our four-bag limit remains in effect. Pickups must be scheduled at a commercial location. Drivers will verify your photo ID at drop-off.*

West Zone (Transit Team)

Call 651-602-1100 or

e-mail [WReservations@metc.state.mn.us](mailto:WReservations@metc.state.mn.us)

East Zone (First Transit East)

Call 651-602-1120

or e-mail [EReservations@metc.state.mn.us](mailto:EReservations@metc.state.mn.us)

South Zone (First Transit South)

Call 651-602-1180 or

e-mail [SReservations@metc.state.mn.us](mailto:SReservations@metc.state.mn.us)