

N E W S R E L E A S E

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Nearly 20 million unemployment claims so far in COVID-19 pandemic

Alert about delays pending eligibility determination interviews

Sacramento – The California Employment Development Department (EDD) has processed more than [19.8 million claims](#) in support of families and communities across the state. That accounts for one in every five unemployment claims processed across the country – far exceeding the claims and benefits paid of any other state.

Update on Phase 2 of extended PUA/PEUC benefits

EDD will be sending emails next week to impacted individuals notifying them that phase two of the extension of federal benefit programs is coming and to look for the chance to start certifying for benefits by March 7, 2021. They will receive emails, texts, or mailed notices in a few weeks telling them when the new additional up to 11 weeks of benefits will available to them for certifying their eligibility.

This group of claimants includes those who ran out of their Pandemic Unemployment Assistance (PUA) and Pandemic Emergency Unemployment Compensation (PEUC) prior to the end of the CARES Act on December 26 which created a gap in benefits. EDD has been working on the programming needed to essentially establish new claims incorporating the up to 11 additional weeks of benefits payable for weeks beginning December 27.

Phase one of the roll-out has been completed. That includes those who still had a balance remaining on their PUA or PEUC claims on December 26, along with new claimants, and EDD continues to sweep our system daily for adding the up to 11 weeks for those running out of their initial PUA or PEUC claims since the end of 2020.

Status of 1.4 Million Suspended Claims

At the end of 2020, EDD suspended payment on 1.4 million claims that were identified as potentially fraudulent based on additional fraud screenings. Individuals associated with approximately 200,000 of those claims were notified of their disqualification and appeal rights or were directed to complete a questionnaire to confirm eligibility for benefits. Another 100,000 without a UI Online account were mailed paper requests for identity verification.

The remaining individuals on 1.1 million of the 1.4 million claims were directed to validate their identity through the ID.me validation process.

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To date 367,749 of these claimants have been verified. The EDD then takes 7-10 days to determine whether the claimant meets all other eligibility requirements. EDD has processed and issued payments, if otherwise eligible, on 367,014 of the claims that have validated their identity.

Since a large portion of the remaining individuals have not opened the message sent to them last month, EDD is reaching out again to this group via email and text informing them of the need to verify their identity. If there is no response, the individual will be disqualified and notified of appeal rights.

The EDD has information available to help claimants maximize the [self-service function in ID.me](#) for the fastest processing possible. Currently, 88% of claimants utilize this self-service feature to quickly verify and protect their account. To avoid delays, claimants should make sure:

- **Personal information matches.** The name, date of birth, and Social Security number must match the information on file with the Social Security Administration (SSA) or the Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV). For example, someone may have changed a name but didn't notify the DMV or the individual recently moved.
- **Correct documentation is provided.** Claimants must provide un-expired documents with correct name or date of birth, such as an official birth certificate.

Unsuccessful verification attempts may be due to many reasons including:

- Submitting an unreadable photo.
- Submitting a phone number that is not associated with the individual's name and address.
- Credit report is locked, frozen, or contains erroneous information.
- Individuals are already verified identity with ID.me or had an error or typo on their submission.

If an individual needs the assistance of an ID.me representative, guidance is available through [how to verify your identity on a video call \(PDF\)](#). ID.me continues to increase staffing to help shorten wait times for this service.

Alert about "Pending" status delays on claims

The EDD is alerting claimants that delays can occur in issuing payments on a claim when eligibility issues arise in this week-by-week unemployment insurance program. Individuals may see their claim enter a "pending" status as EDD is required to return to conducting phone interviews with claimants to investigate any potential issue with their eligibility for payment.

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Some latitude on eligibility requirements during this pandemic continues. For example, usually a qualified individual must be actively looking for work each week they wish to collect unemployment benefits. With the economic shutdown that has created a limited labor market, EDD is working swiftly to update claimants' current "seek work plan" on their account and not require them to look for work at this time. Although, they must continue to be able and available to immediately accept work if offered.

Other eligibility requirements also continue to be in force and are important for claimants to be aware of in order to avoid disqualification from certain weeks of benefits or delays in payments.

- **Initial Claim** – in order to qualify for a claim, an individual must have earned a minimum amount of wages over the last 18 months and be unemployed or working less hours through no fault of their own. If the individual was terminated or quit, a phone interview will be required to establish eligibility.
- **Bi-weekly Certification** – after initiating a claim, the individual must also certify their eligibility every two weeks they wish to collect benefits. Certifying is answering basic questions that tells EDD you're still unemployed and eligible to receive payment. Requirements include:
 - **Being able and available for work.** If a claimant tells EDD they were too sick or had other reasons for not being able to accept work if it was offered, the EDD must follow up with a phone interview to determine eligibility for payment during that period.
 - **Being willing to accept suitable work.** If a claimant refuses a job offer in the individual's customary occupation, a phone interview will need to be conducted.
 - **Reporting any work or earnings.** A claimant must tell EDD if they worked at all during the bi-weekly period and provide any gross earnings (all earned money or income before taxes or any other deductions). The first \$25 or 25% of those earnings (whichever is greater) are not deducted from benefits. For example, if an individual earns \$400 in a week, the EDD will deduct \$300 from the benefit payment for that week because the first \$100 (25%) does not apply.

The EDD provides [FAQs](#) as well as [video tutorials in four different languages](#) to help claimants understand and complete this legally required certification step to collecting unemployment benefits.

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