

# **FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS**

## **Employment, Workforce Development and Disability Inclusion (EWDDI) –**

### **COVID-19 REPOSE**

**March 17, 2020**

#### **Employment Insurance**

#### **Q1. How is the government supporting working Canadians through EI?**

**A1.** The Government of Canada is responding to COVID-19 by:

- Waiving the Employment Insurance (EI) waiting period for people who are claiming EI sickness benefits when placed in quarantine as of March 15, 2020;
- Introducing special measures to provide increased support to employers and workers adversely affected by COVID-19 which will extend the maximum duration of Work-Sharing agreements from 38 weeks to 76 weeks, waiving the cooling off period between Work-Sharing agreements and increasing flexibilities around the requirements of the employer Recovery Plan. These measures are effective March 15, 2020 to March 14, 2021.

Establishing priority access to call centre agents for EI sickness benefits claimants who are in quarantine. Service Canada offices are ready to support clients affected by COVID-19 who are in quarantine by offering a new, dedicated toll free number and priority processing of their applications. The dedicated toll free number is 1-833-381-2725. In addition, to ensure Canadians can keep themselves informed, Service Canada has the latest and most up to date information about COVID-19 on the Canada.ca site ([Canada.ca/coronavirus](https://Canada.ca/coronavirus)) and provides general information over a dedicated phone service (1-833-784-4397). These measures complement other Government of Canada initiatives to support quarantines and protect the public health of Canadians.

#### **Q2. What are the eligibility requirements?**

**A2.** Waiving the EI waiting period for EI sickness benefits provide additional support to those in quarantine. To be eligible for EI sickness benefits, the claimant must

have accumulated a minimum of 600 hours of insurable employment in the last 52-week period preceding a claim, or since the start of their last claim whichever is shorter. A Record of Employment from the employer is required.

The one week waiting period is waived and a medical certificate is not required for EI sickness benefits claimants for whom a period of quarantine is imposed when the quarantine is:

- Imposed on the individual under the laws of Canada or a province
- Imposed on the individual by a public health official for the health and safety of the public at large, **or**
- Recommended by such an official for health and safety of the public at large, and the individual was asked by their employer, medical doctor, a nurse or a person in authority to place themselves under quarantine.

The term quarantine is intended to be broad and include individuals who are in self-isolation on the recommendation of a public health official, their employer, medical doctor, a nurse or a person in authority. A person in authority is intended to be inclusive of other orders of “employer” (eg: a principal or chancellor of a school, a commanding officer etc.)

Claimants who fall sick during the quarantine period and collect benefits beyond the period of quarantine are not required to obtain and retain a medical certificate, which has been the current practice for all other sickness benefits claims.

Individuals who are unsure if they are eligible to have their waiting period waived or have other questions regarding their eligibility should contact Service Canada’s call centres at 1-833-381-2725.

For more details on eligibility criteria, visit:

<https://www.canada.ca/en/services/benefits/ei/ei-sickness/qualify.html>

- Please note: Self-employed persons, including fishers, may also qualify if they have met the eligibility requirements for EI special benefits.
- For more details for self-employed visit:  
<https://www.canada.ca/en/services/benefits/ei/ei-self-employed-workers.html>
- For fishers: <https://www.canada.ca/en/employment-social-development/programs/ei/ei-list/reports/fishing-benefits.html#h2.6-h3.2>

For all other self-employed persons:  
<https://www.canada.ca/en/services/benefits/ei/ei-self-employed-workers/eligibility.html>

**Q3. How much could Canadians qualify for?**

**A3.** EI sickness benefits could provide claimants with up to 15 weeks of temporary income support if they cannot work due to illness, injury or quarantine. They could receive 55% of their earnings up to a maximum of \$573 a week.

**Q4. How do claimants apply?**

**A4.** Application procedures are the same for all EI sickness benefits.

Claimants must first complete a standard online application. Claimants placed in quarantine and who want their waiting period waived must contact Service Canada's call centres at 1-833-381-2725 to declare that they have been placed in quarantine for the safety of the public at large.

Claimants who cannot complete their application because of being placed in quarantine may have their EI claims backdated to cover the period of delay. This is the case for all other EI claimants who are prevented from filing on time due to circumstances beyond their control.

To apply online, visit [Canada.ca/EI](https://Canada.ca/EI).

**Q5. Is the waiver for people placed in quarantine available for those quarantined before March 15, 2020?**

**A5.** No. The one-week waiting period is waived for people who are in quarantine and establish a new claim for EI Sickness benefits. The new regulations are effective as of March 11, 2020 and came into force on March 15<sup>th</sup>, 2020.

**Q6. Is the waiting period waived for claimants on EI regular benefits?**

**A6.** No. The waiting period is waived for people who are placed in quarantine and are claiming EI sickness benefits.

**Q7. What if an individual is ill from a serious communicable disease but is not placed in quarantine?**

**A7.** Ill Individuals may be eligible for sickness benefits if they have worked 600 hours of insurable employment in the last 52-weeks, or since the start of their last claim whichever is shorter. The waiting period will continue to apply.

**Q8. Does the waived waiting period have an effect on the number of weeks of entitlement to benefits for EI claimants?**

**A8.** No, the number of weeks of entitlement to sickness benefits remains unchanged. The maximum number of weeks is 15.

**Q9. What if someone falls sick before the full 14-day quarantine has lapsed?**

**A9.** If the person has already applied for sickness benefits, they should continue to report their illness (by completing bi-weekly reports) and obtain and retain a medical certificate. This is consistent with current practices for sickness benefits claims.

**Q10. What if someone falls sick sometime after the 14-day quarantine?**

**A10.** If the person has already applied for sickness benefits, and collected 2 weeks of benefits during the quarantine period, then returned to work only to fall ill later, they will be able to renew their claim by re-applying online (it's a shorter application process), or, contacting Service Canada's call centres at 1-833-381-2725. The remaining 13 weeks of sickness benefits will be available to the claimant, provided they continue to meet entitlement criteria.

Claimants who fall sick after the quarantine period will be required to obtain and retain a medical certificate. This is consistent with current practices for sickness benefits claims.

**Q11. Do EI benefits cover lost salaries for parents forced to stay home with children?**

**A11.** We continue to explore options to support working Canadians who are not EI-eligible. The Prime Minister and the Finance Minister will have more to say on March 18, 2020.

**Q12. How do these measures affect international travellers returning to Canada?**

**A12.** International travellers returning to Canada are advised to self-isolate for 14 days upon arrival. Individuals should contact Service Canada for specific details on their EI sickness claim using the dedicated phone line at 1-833-381-2725. They should also speak with their employer regarding specific case details.

### **Work-Sharing**

**Q13. What is Work-Sharing?**

**A13.** Work-Sharing is an adjustment program designed to help employers and employees avoid layoffs when there is temporary reduction in the normal level of business activity that is beyond the control of the employer.

Under a Work-Sharing agreement, employers, employees (the union, if applicable) and Service Canada agree to reduce the employees' work week by a minimum of one half day, up to a maximum of three days while the employer recovers. To help compensate for the hours not worked, eligible employees receive income support in the form of EI Work-Sharing benefits if they are eligible for regular EI benefits.

For more information on the program, please visit the [Government of Canada's](#) website.

**Q14. How is Work-Sharing supporting employers and employees affected by COVID-19?**

**A14.** The Government of Canada has introduced enhancements to the Work-Sharing program to help support employers and their workers who are experiencing a downturn in business due to COVID-19. These measures are in effect from March 15, 2020 to March 14, 2021. These enhancements include:

- Doubling the length of agreements from up to 38 weeks to 76 weeks;
- Eliminating the cool off period between agreements so that employers with recently expired agreements can start subsequent ones sooner; and
- Increasing flexibilities for the mandatory employer recovery plan.

**Q15. What is a Recovery Plan?**

**A15.** The recovery plan is normally part of the application process, used to demonstrate that the employer will implement activities during the period of the Work-Sharing agreement to alleviate the work shortage in order to return the Work-Sharing participants to normal working hours by the end of the agreement.

The plan outlines activities which will be undertaken during the life of the agreement to return the Work-Sharing participants to normal working hours, thereby preventing layoffs. For example, activities may include the marketing, financial, production, human resources and/or product research and development plans of the business.

Additionally, the plan should reflect the particular circumstances of the business, the cause of the work shortage and the conditions of the community/industry in which the employer operates.

A recovery plan template is available in [HTML](#) and [Word](#) format. Please refer to the [Applicant Guide](#) for more information.

In the case of COVID-19, employers will have increased flexibilities around the requirements of the employer Recovery Plan.

**Q16. Have temporary special Work-Sharing measures been put in place in the past?**

**A16.** Yes, in July 2017, as part of the Softwood Lumber Action Plan, the Government of Canada announced temporary special Work-Sharing measures to support employers and employees experiencing a decrease in work activity related to the downturn in the forestry sector. To be eligible for these measures, employers must demonstrate in their Work-Sharing application how their operations and employees have been directly or indirectly affected. These measures are in effect from July 30, 2017 to March 28, 2020, and extend the duration of Work-Sharing agreements by an additional 38 weeks, for a total of 76 weeks.

- In June 2018, the Government of Canada announced temporary special Work-Sharing measures to support employers and employees directly and indirectly affected by the US tariffs on Canadian steel and aluminum products. These measures are in effect from August 19, 2018 to March 27, 2021. To be eligible for these measures, employers must demonstrate in their Work-Sharing application how their operations and employees have been directly or indirectly affected.
- Both measures extend the duration of Work-Sharing agreements by an additional 38 weeks, for a total of 76 weeks. The mandatory cooling off period has also been waived so that employers with a recently expired agreement may immediately apply for a new agreement, without waiting between applications.

Additionally, employers approved under these measures are granted flexibility regarding the mandatory recovery plan.

**Q17. How do I apply for Work-Sharing?**

**A17. Employers:**

To be eligible for Work-Sharing, an employer must:

- be experiencing a recent decline in business activity of at least 10%;
- demonstrate that the shortage of work is temporary, beyond your control and not a cyclical/recurring slowdown;
- be a year-round business in Canada for at least two years;
- be a private business, a publicly held company or a not-for-profit organization;
- have at least two employees in the Work-Sharing unit;

For additional information on eligibility, please visit the [Government of Canada's website](#).

### **Employees:**

To be eligible for Work-Sharing, employees must:

- be year-round, permanent, full-time or part-time employees needed to carry out the day-to-day functions of the business (your "core staff");
- be eligible to receive EI benefits; and
- agree to reduce their normal working hours by the same percentage with other employees participating and to share the available work.

For additional information on eligibility, please visit the [Government of Canada's website](#).

Employees should be provided with a copy of the Employee Annex before the application is completed.

Employers are instructed to submit their completed applications by mail to their local [Service Canada Centre](#). All agreements start on a Sunday.

Before submitting an application, employers should carefully review the [Applicant Guide](#) to understand the Work-Sharing eligibility criteria, and program terms and conditions before applying.

**Q18. Normally, completed Work-Sharing applications must be submitted a minimum of 30 days prior to the requested start date, is this still the case?**

**A18.** We are working to make this application as flexible as possible for employers and employees during these exceptional circumstances. To allow for the required assessment and approval process for Work-Sharing including the registration of all eligible employees into the Work-Sharing unit, it is suggested that applicants be submitted 30 days before the proposed start date. Service Canada officials will process applications in an expedited manner based on the requested start date.

**Q19. When will I know if my application is approved?**

**A19.** Service Canada will acknowledge in writing the receipt of an application.

All applications are subject to an assessment and approval process carried out by Service Canada. Service Canada officials will inform employers of the status of their application. All decisions on applications, whether rejected or approved, will be confirmed in writing.

Decisions regarding the assessment of applications are final. There is no appeal process for the rejection of a Work-Sharing application.

**Q20. How many Canadians are assisted by Work-Sharing?**

**A20.** Work-Sharing participation is countercyclical. In good economic conditions, applications for Work-Sharing are low. During times of economic downturn, the number of applications can dramatically increase, as more employers may face temporary challenges that are beyond their control.

The manufacturing industry has historically accounted for the largest proportion of agreements. Small and medium-sized enterprises sign the majority of Work-Sharing agreements.

- In 2009-2010 there was an estimated 24,385 layoffs averted as a result of Work-Sharing participation, which is the highest number of layoffs averted on record.
- In 2017-2018, the most recent year for which ESDC has publically available data:
  - there were 198 active Work-Sharing agreements in Canada, compared to 862 in 2016-2017.
  - there were approximately 3,708 Work-Sharing claimants, a 68.9% decrease in claimants compared to the 11,936 in 2016-2017.
- EI Work-Sharing benefits paid to claimants in 2017-2018 amounted to \$13.1M, a 69.8% decrease from \$43.4M in 2016-2017.

For questions related to this document, please contact Matthew Cavett-Goodwin at [matthew.cavettgoodwin@hrsdcc-rhdcc.gc.ca](mailto:matthew.cavettgoodwin@hrsdcc-rhdcc.gc.ca).