

## Indiana DWD announces COVID-19 guidance

The Indiana Department of Workforce Development (DWD) has announced actions it has undertaken pursuant to Governor Holcomb's Executive Orders 20-05 and 20-12 and federal legislation passed in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

*Able and available requirement.* DWD is relaxing the able and available requirement for persons impacted by COVID-19. In addition, the state has made work search optional and suspended in-person jobs counseling and training for persons receiving unemployment benefits during the pandemic.

*Extended benefits.* DWD was notified by the U.S. Department of Labor that Indiana triggered "on" Extended Benefits (EB). The EB program provides federal reimbursement to the state for up to an additional 13 weeks of unemployment insurance benefits. EB took effect on June 7, 2020, as the state's unemployment rate exceeded the 5% threshold to trigger the extension.

*Impact on employer tax rates.* DWD announced that contributory employers will not be directly charged for separations between March 13, 2020, and the end of the COVID-19-related separations (anticipated to be no later than December 31, 2020). DWD will mutualize all benefit charges for contributory employers prior to assessing the 2021 merit rates. All employers will continue to receive a monthly statement of benefit charges if workers are collecting unemployment against their base period wages. The November 2020 employer statement will show the benefit charge reversals for all charges removed from accounts related to benefits through June 30, 2020. Benefits charged after June 30, 2020, do not affect the 2021 merit rates and will be removed separately at a later date prior to assessing merit rates for 2022. Mutualization of charges will not prevent merit rates from changing in 2021. This measure prevents direct charging of benefits to employer accounts. In addition, the state is redirecting benefit charges for contributory employers to the pooled account ensuring that any benefits paid under temporary expanded interpretations are not charged directly to the employer and deducting 50% of benefit charges for reimbursable employers.

*Separation from work.* DWD is relaxing the interpretation of "good cause in connection with the work" relating to separation from employment to best serve claimants out of work due to COVID-19 and allowing the late filing of unemployment benefits applications and weekly vouchers if the lack of timely filing is connected to COVID-19.

Further, the state is permitting persons who take a voluntary leave of absence with the permission of their employer due to COVID-19 to continue accumulating unemployment benefit weeks.

*Waiting week.* The one-week waiting period for payment of UI was waived by the Governor's Executive Order on March 26, 2020. The waiver was retroactive to the week of March 8, 2020. Benefits will be paid for the first week the individual is eligible (*Indiana DWD Press Release*, June 16, 2020; see <https://www.in.gov/dwd>); *Indiana DWD Employer FAQs for COVID-19 Work-Related Issues*, May 19, 2020; see [https://www.in.gov/dwd/files/Indiana\\_Unemployment\\_FAQ\\_Employers.pdf](https://www.in.gov/dwd/files/Indiana_Unemployment_FAQ_Employers.pdf)).