

COVID-19: Know Your Rights

If you or someone you know is part of a low-income Massachusetts household, the following information may help you know your rights and access resources you need during this crisis. This information is accurate as of 3/18/2020 and subject to change, as the situation evolves.

Housing

- **Evictions (and other housing court cases) are currently suspended.** All current eviction cases are postponed until no earlier than April 21, 2020.
 - You should receive a notice of your new court date in the mail, or you can check your case at www.masscourts.org.
 - If your court date was after March 1, 2020 and a “default” judgment entered against you, you can file a “motion to remove the default” and it “shall be granted.”
 - Landlords can still contact you to negotiate an agreement in a pending case—seek advice before signing anything or wait until your court date to reach an agreement.
- **Move-outs can still be scheduled for people who lost their housing court case already.** If you receive a notice from the sheriff telling you that you are scheduled to be moved out, contact the housing court (see below).
- **The housing courts are only hearing emergency matters at this time.** For a case to be heard before April 21st, you or your landlord need to ask the court to hear the case and explain why it is urgent that your case be heard immediately. Emergency matters are where:
 - The tenant(s) received a 48 Hour Notice (that is, immediately facing move-out by the sheriff);
 - There is no heat, no hot water, or where the property is condemned;
 - The landlord is threatening to change the locks or evict the tenant without judicial process;
 - The condition of the apartment or the conduct of tenant threatens the health or safety of the residents.
- **If you cannot afford to pay your bill during the COVID-19 crisis, utility companies cannot shut off your service.** Massachusetts has extended a moratorium on utility shutoffs for the duration of the State of Emergency.
- **If you live in state-aided public housing and lose income, you can seek a decrease in your rent.** Contact your housing provider/housing authority to request an interim recertification of your rental portion. Agencies are directed to accept electronic and prospective documentation for verifications during this time. Any rent change will go into effect on the first day of the following month, at the latest.
- **Coronavirus doesn’t recognize race, nationality, or ethnicity—and housing discrimination laws protect against discrimination by housing providers.**

Landlords are prohibited engaging in discriminatory conduct related to COVID-19 based on race, nationality, ethnicity, disability, religion, or any other protected classes.

Online information is available at www.masslegalhelp.org.

Healthcare

- **If you lose income during the COVID-19 crisis, you may be eligible for improved public health insurance benefits.** Make sure to report this change to MassHealth to see if you qualify for a different coverage level.
- **If you are uninsured, Mass Health Connector has extended the application period through April 25.** This will help ensure that you can access services related to COVID-19 without facing additional cost barriers. You will need to apply online or by phone.
- **If you have MassHealth, you will be covered for testing and treatment for COVID-19, regardless of your plan.** Contact your primary care provider first for a referral.
- **If you have private Massachusetts insurance, you will be covered for testing and treatment for COVID-19, including co-pays and deductibles.** Massachusetts health insurers are required to cover all costs and to provide medically necessary telehealth and counseling without charge.
- **If you have a condition that requires medication, MassHealth is allowing early refills and 90-day supplies of medications.**
- **If you are too sick to complete an application and need immediate treatment, you may be able to get temporary coverage.** The Affordable Care Act (ACA) allows qualified hospitals to make presumptive eligibility determinations for immediate, time-limited Medicaid coverage using self-attested information from individuals who appear to be eligible, but are unable to complete a full application at that time. Certain limitations are waived if the individual has a presumptive COVID-19 diagnosis.
- **If you are an immigrant concerned about public charge, you will not be penalized for seeing COVID-19 testing, treatment or preventative care.** Remember that using any public benefits will not impact you if you are a green card holder, U.S. citizen, refugee, asylum seeker, VAWA recipient, TPS holder, or holder of a U or T visa.
- **If you are undocumented and need healthcare, you may be eligible for MassHealth Limited.** This coverage provides care for medical emergencies, including visits to an emergency room. Public charge does not apply to MassHealth Limited.
- **If you do not have a PCP, multiple local options exist to schedule an appointment with one:**
 - **UMass Memorial:** Call 855-UMASS-MD or call either of its CareWell urgent care centers (Lincoln Street: 774-420-2111 or Greenwood Street: 774-420-2111).
 - **St. Vincent:** <http://www.stvincentmedgroup.com> or 1-844-MASS-DOC
 - **Reliant Medical Group:** <https://reliantmedicalgroup.org>

- **For Immigrant Families:** USCIS [announced](#) that the agency **will NOT consider** “testing, treatment, nor preventative care (including vaccines, if a vaccine becomes available) related to COVID-19” in a public charge determination “even if such treatment is provided or paid for by one or more public benefits.”

Contact the MassHealth Customer Service Center at [\(800\) 841-2900](tel:8008412900) for various healthcare questions, or access enrollment assistance through Mass Health Connector at [1-877-MA-ENROLL](tel:1877MAENROLL) (1-877-623-6765), or TTY [1-877-623-7773](tel:18776237773) for people who are deaf, hard of hearing, or speech disabled.

Food & Cash Benefits

- **Your children may still be able to get school meals.** Many cities and towns will continue to provide free breakfast and lunch to students in their respective districts. Further information can be found through Project Bread.
- **If you lose income during this public health crisis, you may be entitled to more SNAP (food stamp) benefits.** Make sure you report changes to DTA right away, so they can calculate adjustments. If the change qualifies you for the maximum benefit, DTA must issue the additional amount the same month you report the change.
- **DTA offices are closed to the public during COVID-19**
- **If you receive cash benefits (TAFDC/EAEDC), you can complete your appointment by phone rather than visiting the office in person during this crisis.** The in-person meeting requirement is being suspended as a result of COVID-19. You can also apply for cash assistance over the phone by calling the local DTA office. **Worcester:** 508-767-3100 **Fitchburg:** 978-665-8700 **Southbridge:** 508-765-2400

Contact the Department of Transitional Assistance for SNAP general assistance at [\(877\) 382-2363](tel:8773822363); contact the DTA Ombudsman office for with complaints or concerns regarding your case at [617-348-5354](tel:6173485354). Contact the Senior Assistance Unit if you are over 60 and need help with your SNAP case [833-712-8027](tel:8337128027).

Unemployment & Worker Protections

- The latest information is at: <https://www.mass.gov/info-details/massachusetts-covid-19-unemployment-information>.

For Workers Already on Unemployment Compensation:

- Requirements to attend seminars at MassHire centers are suspended
- Deadlines missed due to effects of COVID-19 will be excused under the “good cause” rules
- All appeal hearings are **by telephone only**- if you have an appeal pending, make sure DUA has a correct phone number for you

For Workers Out of Work or Losing Hours Due to COVID-19

- IF SOMEONE IS OUT OF WORK OR HAS HAD A REDUCTION IN HOURS FOR ANY REASON RELATED TO COVID-19, THEY SHOULD APPLY FOR UNEMPLOYMENT COMPENSATION (UC) (unless they are getting paid sick leave from their employer) – claimants are eligible in any of these situations:
 - The business has shut down
 - Their hours have been reduced significantly
 - They have been told to stay home
 - They have to stay out to care for a child or other family member
- Apply through UI Online - <https://uionline.detma.org/Claimant/Core/Login.ASPX>
If people can't use UI Online because of language, special needs, disability, etc., there is a form to set up a callback from DUA - <https://www.mass.gov/forms/covid-19-department-of-unemployment-assistance-contact-request>

Driver's Licenses (RMV)

- The RMV will implement a 60-day extension to the current expiration date for Class D, Class DMs, ID cards, and Learner's Permits within the RMV system. All individuals with expired/expiring credentials dated between March 1, 2020 and April 30, 2020, will continue to have an active status until sixty (60) days after the expiration date printed on their credential. This does not apply to immigrants whose end of stay in the United States is the same as the expiration date on their driver's license, ID card, or Learner's Permit.

Additional Resources:

- **Call Community Legal Aid's intake line at 855.CLA.LEGAL (855.252.5342)** if you are denied any of the above benefits or believe you have faced discrimination. You may also apply on line at Communitylegal.org.
- **Call 2-1-1 or visit 211.org** for information on food, housing, health insurance, and other resources.
- **Project Bread has a FoodSource Hotline** that can be reached at **1-800-645-8333** or by chat at Gettingsnap.org. This is a great way to get help with your SNAP application.