FAQ: Unemployment Insurance Work Search Requirement

Q 1. Do I have to do work search activity to keep getting my unemployment benefits?

A. Beginning October 4, 2020 everyone receiving unemployment must participate in work search activities to be eligible for benefits. But there are two exceptions to this rule. You do not have to participate in work search activities if:

1. You are under medical quarantine or isolation because you have tested positive for the Coronavirus, or have been actually or possibly exposed to it. This exception does NOT apply if you have been told by a medical professional that you should not return to work because you are high risk, but you are not actually under quarantine for testing positive or being exposed to COVID-19;

OR

2. You have an actual recall date to return to work with your employer. In this case you can enter this information on your weekly certification and automatically receive a 6-week work search waiver. If your recall date is more than six weeks away, you can decide to use those six weeks at any time by speaking with an MDOL representative. Most people choose to use this work search for the last six weeks of the lay-off.

IMPORTANT NOTE: Just because you are required to search for work does NOT mean that you have to have to actually take a job you are offered IF you have a COVID-19 related reason to refuse that job. See more at Question 10 below.

Q 2. What counts as a work search activity, and how many activities do I have to do a week?

A. Because COVID-19 has made looking for work more difficult, the Department of Labor has expanded the kinds of activities that “count” as work search. These activities can be done at home, at your convenience. Browsing the Internet is a good way to find potential job openings or leads but does NOT by itself count as a work search activity.
To continue to qualify for benefits you only must do ONE of the following activities each week:

- Attend an in-person or virtual job fair supported by a CareerCenter. See: [https://www.mainecareercenter.gov/employment/jobfairs.shtml](https://www.mainecareercenter.gov/employment/jobfairs.shtml)
- Participate in a no-cost CareerCenter virtual workshop like resume writing, using Maine JobLink, developing and expanding your business, college planning, career exploration and more. Information on how to register for a workshop can be found at: [http://www.mainecareercenter.com/employment/workshops.shtml](http://www.mainecareercenter.com/employment/workshops.shtml)
- Apply for a job for which you are reasonably qualified using the Maine JobLink (https://joblink.maine.gov/) or other job boards
- Interview for a job for which you are reasonably qualified
- Contact an employer to inquire as to whether the employer is hiring
- Participate in professional job-related education or skills development through Coursera, your local Community College, Adult Education program or other approved educational program.
- Utilize career or job-related resources available through the Maine State Library including:
  - Learning Express Library--Career preparation
  - Peterson’s Career Prep—resume development; career exploration and other job-related guidance

Q-3. What if I don’t have a computer or internet access?

If you DO NOT HAVE A COMPUTER you meet your work search requirement by arranging personal appointment on the phone with someone at the Career Center for career guidance sessions. Call your local CareerCenter at:

- Augusta: 207-624-5120
- Bangor/Tri-County: 207-561-4050
- Brunswick/South Midcoast: 207-721-8200
- Calais: 207-454-7551
- Lewiston: 207-753-9001
- Machias/Washington County: 207-255-1900
Q 4. What do I have to do to meet the work search requirement if I am self-employed?

A. If you are self-employed you can meet the work search requirement by taking steps to begin reopening your business. For example, you could start: marketing your business, attending networking events, participating in relevant workshops, meeting with Maine’s Office of Business Development to understand the resources available to small businesses.

If you are self-employed but not yet taking steps to reopen your business you can meet the work search requirement by taking one of the steps listed in the answer to Question 2 that are appropriate for a self-employed person.

Q 5. What if I need help filling out my weekly certification correctly to show that I searched for work?

A. There is help. The Department of labor has three videos to walk you through how to complete your weekly certification:

- If you are Self-Employed: https://youtu.be/zHcmmaXttqM
- If Taking a Coursera Course: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6ZkJTnHRlsw (watch this one if you are engaged in any education or training program)
- If Working Part-time: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Sy7VwTjB7Bs

Q 6. What if my children are home from school some or all of the time, or I can’t find child care because of COVID-19—do I still have to do a work search activity?

A. Yes, you still have to do a work search activity. You can meet this requirement by doing one of the activities listed in the answers to questions 2 or 3 above. You can find one of these activities that can be done from home at your convenience.

Q 7. Do I have to look for work if I’m already working part-time?
A. No. Your part time work counts as your work search activity. Here is a short video to help part time workers fill out their weekly certification: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Sy7VwTjB7Bs

Q 8. How do I prove that I have done my work search?

A. You can do this by answering the work search questions on your weekly certification. If you contacted an employer, you must give the name or names of people you spoke with and the contact information for the business.

The Department does a random audit of people claiming unemployment benefits to confirm that the activity you listed on your weekly claim is correct. Be sure to keep a record of your activities for each week in case you are selected for an audit. If you cannot document your activity you may lose benefits for that week.

Q 9. What happens if I don't do a work search activity that I was required to do?

A. The first time you do not do a work search activity, you will get a reminder letter explaining the requirement and how you can do it in future weeks. If you were otherwise eligible for benefits you will not lose your benefits for that week.

If you fail to do required work search a second time, the Department will contact you to ask why you didn't complete a work search activity. This is called a fact-finding interview. You can choose to do this by completing a questionnaire online, or over the phone with a department representative. Based on this fact-finding interview, the Department will determine if you were eligible for benefits for that week. If benefits were already paid for a week but you were later denied as a result of this review, the benefits for that week may have to be repaid to MDOL. You have the right to appeal the decision and, in some cases, request a waiver of any overpayment. (We have more information about overpayment waivers.)

IMPORTANT NOTE: Not participating in work search related activities for a week will only result in a denial in benefits for that particular week.

Q 10. If I am offered a job, will I lose my unemployment benefits if I refuse to take it?

A. If you refuse an offer of work from an employer you will be scheduled for a fact-finding interview to determine if you are eligible to continue receiving benefits. Your benefits will NOT be stopped until there is a decision from this fact-finding interview.
Here is how the Department will decide if you will remain eligible after refusing a job:

- **If you are receiving unemployment through the Pandemic Unemployment Assistance Program (PUA),** you will remain eligible for benefits if you refuse a job because you are unable to work for a COVID-19-related reason. (See Covid-19-related reasons below). If you refuse a job for some other reason you may lose your PUA benefits.

- **If you are receiving unemployment benefits through the regular state unemployment program,** you will remain eligible if you refuse a job that is NOT “suitable”. Refusal of “suitable work” is discussed here: [https://ptla.org/unemployed-worker-benefits](https://ptla.org/unemployed-worker-benefits)

BUT, even if you are denied regular unemployment benefits for refusing a “suitable” job, you may be able to get PUA instead if you refused a job for a COVID-19-related reason and you cannot telework, and are not getting sick leave or other paid leave benefits.

Here is a list of COVID-19-related reasons that justify refusing a job offer:

- Your place of employment is closed due to COVID-19
- You are self-employed and cannot perform your customary work because of COVID-19
- Your child’s school or childcare facility is closed, you are the primary caregiver and you cannot work as a result
- Your healthcare provider has advised you to self-quarantine OR a household member's healthcare provider has advised that the household self-quarantine due to concerns related to COVID-19
- You or a member of your household has been diagnosed with COVID-19 OR you are having symptoms of COVID-19 OR you are needed to care for a family member who has been diagnosed with COVID-19
- You are not able to report to your job due to quarantine related to COVID-19
- You were scheduled begin employment but do not have a job or cannot report to your job due to COVID-19
- You have become the breadwinner or major support for your household because the head of the household died as a direct result of COVID-19
- You had to quit your job as a direct result of COVID-19