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Home (/) > Unemployment Insurance Handbook for Claimants (/unemployed/Claimant-Handbook) > Applying for Benefits



Applying for Benefits

If you are totally or partially unemployed and wish to apply for benefits, call the VEC Customer Contact Center or complete an on-line application on the Internet. The Customer Contact Center telephone number is 1-866-832-2363 (Available 8:15am to 4:30pm, Monday - Friday. Closed state holidays.) The Internet address is www.vec.virginia.gov (<http://www.vec.virginia.gov/>) [1]. The addresses and telephone numbers for VEC Workforce Centers can be found in the phone book, or at the VEC website.

You will be asked to supply the name, address and telephone number of your last employer (and, in some cases, previous employers), your dates of employment, and the reason for separation.

You will be asked to select your electronic payment method for receipt of your benefits. You can select either direct deposit or a debit card. For direct deposit you will need your bank account and routing numbers. After you file your application for benefits, the VEC will decide whether you meet three separate requirements: 1) Monetary eligibility; 2) Separation qualification; and 3) Weekly eligibility.

Monetary Eligibility

In order to qualify for benefits, you must have earned enough wages in covered employment during the base period. The amount of wages you earned will determine your weekly benefit amount and the maximum number of weeks (12 to 26 weeks) to which you will be entitled. Benefit computation tables are available on the VEC website. You will receive a Monetary Determination that contains your base period earnings, weekly benefit amount and the maximum number of weeks you may receive benefits. Monetary entitlement lasts one year from the effective date of your claim, or until the benefits exhaust, whichever comes first.

Review your monetary determination carefully. If you feel the wages shown for your base period are incorrect, you may call the VEC Customer Contact Center at 1-866-832-2363 (Available 8:15am to 4:30pm, Monday - Friday. Closed state holidays.) and provide information to correct the wages. You will be asked to fax or mail proof of correct wages (W-2s, pay stubs) to the number or address provided by the Customer Contact Center. Be sure to keep your monetary determination because it shows your base period information.

Q: How do I know if I have enough wages to qualify?

A: When you file your application for benefits through the Customer Contact Center, your wages will be discussed with you. Regardless of how you file your application for benefits, you will be mailed a monetary determination that contains the wages you earned in covered employment during the base period. You must have been paid a minimum specified amount in two combined quarters of your base period.

Q: What amount of benefits will I receive and for how long?

A: Your monetary determination will show the amount of your weekly benefits and the number of weeks you may be eligible to receive the benefits. It also contains the benefit year ending date. Your weekly benefit amount is determined by the two quarters with highest earnings reported during the base period.

Your total wages earned and reported during the base period determine the maximum benefit amount. Once you establish a claim that reflects all earnings in covered employment during your base period, the amount you qualify for remains the same for one year and is available to you until your maximum benefit amount or your benefit year is exhausted, whichever comes first.

Q: What is the base period?

A: The base period is the first four of the last five completed calendar quarters prior to the effective date of your claim. The effective date of your claim is the Sunday of the week in which you file your application for benefits. The chart that follows illustrates the base period in relation to the effective date of the claim.

(You can go here to figure your base period (<http://www.vec.virginia.gov/unemployed/benefits-information/base-period>) [2])

Effective Date of Claim	Base Period				
	Previous Year	Last Year			This Year
Jan					
Feb					
March	Oct	Jan	Apr	Jul	
	Nov	Feb	May	Aug	
	Dec	Mar	Jun	Sep	
Apr					
May					
Jun		Jan	Apr	Jul	Oct
		Feb	May	Aug	Nov
		Mar	Jun	Sep	Dec
Jul					
Aug					
Sep					

		Apr	Jul	Oct	Jan	
		May	Aug	Nov	Feb	
		Jun	Sep	Dec	Mar	
Oct						
Nov						
Dec		Jul	Oct	Jan	Apr	
		Aug	Nov	Feb	May	
		Sep	Dec	Mar	Jun	

Claimants not qualifying for benefits under the standard base period may do so under an alternate base period.

Q: What is an alternate base period?

A: Claimants who did not earn sufficient wages during the first four of the last five completed calendar quarters may have earned the necessary amount in the alternate base period, the last four completed calendar quarters. The minimum qualifying amount is the same for both periods. Claimants cannot choose which base period they wish to use. The alternate base period can only be used if the claimant cannot qualify with the standard base period.

Q: What if my wages are correct but insufficient to qualify?

A: When you receive your monetary determination, review it carefully to see if it:

1. Omits an employer for whom you worked during the base period;
2. Omits some of the wages you earned during the base period;
3. Lists any employers for whom you did not work during the base period;
4. Lists any earnings amount incorrectly.

If a correction is necessary, request a redetermination from the VEC Customer Contact Center.

If an employer or wages are incorrect or omitted, you must provide the name and address and some evidence of your earnings such as W-2 forms or pay check stubs. Once these wages have been validated, your weekly benefit amount will be adjusted to reflect the correct wages and you will be issued a payment to cover any amount due for the weeks of benefits that have paid.

Q: May I use wages earned in other states to establish a claim?

A: Yes. Wages earned in other states can be used to establish a claim in one of two ways.

1. You file a claim against the other state if you have earned enough wages in that state to qualify for benefits. This is known as an Interstate Claim; or,
2. You request that the wages earned in other states be transferred to Virginia and “combined” to qualify for benefits. Be sure to tell the VEC representative if you have worked in another state.

Only those out-of-state earnings that have not been used on a prior claim will transfer to Virginia. Wages earned overseas also may be used if you worked for a U.S. company. The state where the company is headquartered is the state to which the wages are reported.

Q: What is a “double-dip” claim?

A: If you drew benefits during a prior benefit year and have not performed services on 30 different days or 240 hours for one covered employer since the beginning of that prior benefit year, you may monetarily qualify for a new benefit year, but you will not be eligible to draw those benefits until you have 30 different days or 240 hours of covered employment and are subsequently unemployed through no fault of your own.

Separation Qualification

Even though you may have enough earnings to qualify, there are circumstances that may prevent you from receiving unemployment benefits. If you are unemployed for any reason other than lack of work, it is necessary to gather the facts concerning your separation from employment and render a written determination regarding eligibility.

Q: How are these facts gathered?

A: You give your reason for being unemployed when you file your application for benefits. This information along with a questionnaire is sent to your former employer for completion. It will be necessary for a Deputy, sometimes referred to as a Hearings Officer, to talk with you about your separation from work. You and your employer will be scheduled for a telephonic interview. You have the right to know and comment on any information provided by your employer. The Deputy will make a decision whether you are qualified to receive benefits based on the facts gathered surrounding your reason for separation.

This decision will be included in a Notice of Deputy's Determination that will be sent to you and your employer. You will be disqualified if the Deputy finds that you:

1. Quit your job or are on leave of absence without good cause; or
2. Were fired or suspended from your job for misconduct in connection with your work.

Q: What if I disagree with the Notice of Deputy's Determination?

A: If you disagree with the determination, you may appeal it. Your employer also has the right to appeal. For additional information on the appeal process, refer to the section in this handbook concerning Appeals.

If you decide to appeal the determination, while your appeal is pending, it is very important that you continue to look for work, report those contacts when you file your weekly request for payment of benefits, and file your requests for payment on time. If you do not file your weekly requests for payment while an appeal is pending, you may be ineligible for benefits for those weeks if the Deputy's

determination is overturned.

Weekly Eligibility

Each week you claim benefits, you must be able to perform work, be available for work while placing no undue restrictions on your availability, and be actively seeking work. In addition, you must accept all offers of suitable work, be registered for work with the Virginia Workforce Connection (VWC) accept any VEC referrals to work, report to the VEC when directed to do so, and report income from any source.

Q: What is an active search for work?

A: An active search for work means that you must make two (2) or more job contacts each week in your effort to find work unless instructed otherwise by the VEC. You must be able to provide the VEC, when requested, with information about each employer or company you contact.

You must conduct an active work search and report job contacts even when you work part-time and earn less than your weekly benefit amount.

Just looking through newspaper want ads by employers or looking at postings on the Internet is not acceptable. Additionally, because the Virginia Unemployment Compensation Act requires that claimants provide the name of employers contacted for work, blind ads are not acceptable.

Certain occupations require the use of resume's as the usual and customary means of soliciting work. If you have one of these occupations, faxing, mailing, and E-mailing résumés to prospective employers will be acceptable in lieu of personally contacting employers. The VEC has also made the decision to permit telephone calls as an allowable method of making work search contacts. If the employer indicates applications are being taken when you make the call, be sure you complete the application process before reporting this contact on your weekly claim.

If you are a member of a union that has a local hiring hall, please inform the VEC representative who takes your application for benefits or report it on your on-line application where requested. Your work search requirements will be explained to you at the time you apply for benefits.

As the length of unemployment increases, you are expected to expand your methods of seeking work. You also should be willing to include other occupations for which you are qualified as a result of prior training or experience.

If you do not make any, or only one, job contact during your weekly work search, you may be denied benefits. It is strongly recommended that you keep a personal written record of your work search job contacts to assist you if the need arises or you are asked by the VEC to provide the job contact information for work search verification.

Q: Is anybody going to check or verify my work search?

A: All job contacts are subject to verification. If your information concerning any job contact is false, you can be disqualified from receiving benefits for at least one year or longer if the benefits are not repaid in full by the end of the disqualifying period.

Q: What if the VEC refers me to a job?

A: Periodically the VEC may refer you to a job. If you are referred by the VEC, you must contact the employer to whom you are referred using the method as directed by the VEC. You may count the job referral as one of your required work search job contacts for the week if you visit the employer to whom you were referred.

Q: What happens if I refuse a job offer or VEC referral?

A: If you refuse a job offer, you will be contacted by the VEC to provide additional information. The VEC then will determine if the work was suitable, and if so whether you had good cause to refuse the job offer. If the job was suitable and you did not have good cause to refuse it, you may be disqualified from receiving benefits beginning with the Sunday of the week in which such refusal occurred.

If you fail, without good cause, to apply for suitable work when referred by the VEC, you may be disqualified starting with the Sunday of the week in which refusal occurred. The VEC determines whether the referral was to suitable work.

Q: What is suitable work?

A: Many factors are taken into consideration in determining whether work is suitable, such as your previous work experience, physical and mental fitness, risk to your health, safety, or morals, and the distance from your home to the job site. You must report all job offers that you decline when you file your weekly request for payment of benefits.

Q: How much can I earn and still receive benefits?

A: If the gross, *not* net, wages you earned are less than your weekly benefit amount, you may receive unemployment benefits. However, the amount of gross wages that is over \$50 will be deducted from your weekly benefit amount. If your weekly gross earnings are equal to or more than your weekly benefit amount, you will not be paid any unemployment benefits for that week.

Q: What if I receive severance pay, vacation pay, sickness and accident benefits, or holiday pay? A: Severance, vacation, sickness and accident benefits, or holiday pay that you receive may be deducted from your weekly benefit amount in the same manner as actual earnings in any week for which it is payable. You will be notified if these benefits or pay affect your weekly benefit amount.

Q: What if I receive a pension, retirement, etc.?

A: Your benefits may be reduced by the weekly amount of any pension, retirement, etc. that you receive from your most recent employer of 30 days or 240 hours or more or from any employer in the base period of your claim. You will be asked to provide the amount and source of any pension when you apply for benefits. Failure to report any changes in your pension, such as cost of living increases on your weekly request for payment of benefits may result in an overpayment of benefits that you would be liable to repay.

Q: What if I attend school or a training program?

A: Make sure you report any classes you are taking during weeks claimed. You may receive benefits while attending school depending upon the course of study and the required attendance each week. If you wish to attend school or a training program to improve your employment possibilities, you need to request approval in advance from the VEC. The VEC determines if your training is approved and will advise you of your work search requirements while you are in school or training.

Q: What if there is a question about my weekly eligibility?

A: You will be notified to call the VEC for an interview. If you are held ineligible for benefits you will receive a Notice of Deputy's Determination explaining why. If you disagree with the determination, you must file an appeal by the date shown on the notice. Refer to the section entitled Appeal Rights – Filing an Appeal in this handbook. It is very important that you continue to look for work, to report those contacts when filing your weekly request(s) for payment of benefits, and to file your weekly requests for payment **on time** while the appeal is pending. Failure to do so may result in a denial of benefits for weeks that are not timely filed.

Q: If I receive a letter or telephone call to call or report to the VEC, what should I do?

A: Call or report when you are scheduled to do so. If you do not, you may not be paid unemployment benefits for the week you are scheduled to call or report. If you cannot call or report for any reason, call ahead of the scheduled time to explain the circumstances.

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(<http://www.vec.virginia.gov/unemployed/Claimant-Handbook/Claimant-Handbook/Applying-for-Benefits>)

Links:

[1] <http://www.vec.virginia.gov/>

[2] <http://www.vec.virginia.gov/unemployed/benefits-information/base-period>