

# Community Guidance for COVID 19 crisis

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## Contents

Community Guidance for COVID 19 crisis .....	1
Social Security Benefits .....	1
Unemployment Insurance Benefits .....	3
Utilities .....	3
Food Stamps/SNAP, WIC, Cash Assistance, Medicaid: .....	4
Domestic Violence .....	5
Housing .....	6
Foreclosure .....	6
Property Taxes .....	7
Senior & Consumer Law .....	7
Medicare .....	8
Consumer Protection .....	8
Youth Law/Education .....	8

## Social Security Benefits

All local Social Security offices are closed to in-person visits.

Instead, use the online portal ([www.ssa.gov/onlineservices/](http://www.ssa.gov/onlineservices/)) to apply for benefits, appeal denials, check application status, and get other routine services.

Local offices will handle critical issues by telephone (1-888-397-9798 or TTY 603-225-8475).

Critical services include the following:

- Dire need benefit payments, such as not receiving a benefit payment or presumptive payments and needing benefit payments reinstated;
- Severe disability, blindness and terminal illness cases; and
- Dire need SSI and 1619B eligibility decisions required for urgent Medicaid approval.

Direct deposit should work normally. Checks sent by mail may be affected by mail delivery issues.

If you were asked to contact SSA by a certain date, do not go to the office. You can contact SSA offices once they reopen to the public or you can mail your documents. SSA will follow up once the COVID-19 public health emergency subsides.

SSA is providing maximum flexibility in applying good cause policy, extending the time limits for submitting appeals and taking other actions during this public health emergency.

- SSA will not start or complete any current medical continuing disability reviews. If you have a medical continuing disability review pending, please do not request medical information from your doctors at this time.
- SSA will follow up with you for any medical evidence once the COVID-19 public health emergency subsides.
- Where possible, SSA is suspending processing and collection of overpayments.
- SSA is not conducting organization or individual representative payee accountings.
- SSA will not be able to process Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) requests or third party requests for information, except from appointed representatives and representative payees.
- If you have a hearing scheduled, the Social Security Administration may contact you from a PRIVATE number to discuss possible rescheduling.
- Track, save and print anything you do online. Keep notes of any telephone contact with Social Security Administration.
- Be aware of appeal deadlines. Appeal forms are available online ([www.ssa.gov/forms/](http://www.ssa.gov/forms/)).

For more information, visit the SSA Website

**The office of Inspector General is now warning about fraudulent letters threatening suspension of Social Security benefits due to COVID-19 or coronavirus-related office closures. Social Security will not suspend or discontinue benefits because their offices are closed.**

- Some Social Security beneficiaries have received letters through the U.S. Mail stating their payments will be suspended or discontinued unless they call a phone number referenced in the letter. Scammers may then mislead beneficiaries into providing personal information or payment via retail gift cards, wire transfers, internet currency, or by mailing cash, to maintain regular benefit payments during this period of COVID-19 office closures.
- As of Tuesday, March 17, 2020, local Social Security offices are closed to the public due to COVID-19 concerns. However, Social Security employees continue to work. Social Security will not suspend or decrease Social Security benefit payments or Supplemental Security Income payments due to the current COVID-19 pandemic. Any communication you receive that says Social Security will do so is a scam, whether you receive it by letter, text, email, or phone call.

Social Security will never:

- Threaten you with benefit suspension, arrest, or other legal action unless you pay a fine or fee.

- Promise a benefit increase or other assistance in exchange for payment.
- Require payment by retail gift card, cash, wire transfer, internet currency, or prepaid debit card.
- Demand secrecy from you in handling a Social Security-related problem. Send official letters or reports containing personally identifiable information via email.

If you receive a letter, text, call or email that you believe to be suspicious, about an alleged problem with your Social Security number, account, or payments, hang up or do not respond. We encourage you to report Social Security scams using this online form

## Unemployment Insurance Benefits

All New Hampshire Employment Security (NHES) offices are closed.

You may apply for unemployment and other services online ([www.nhes.nh.gov/](http://www.nhes.nh.gov/)) or by phone (603-271-7700).

- For the duration of NH's State of Emergency, currently scheduled to end May 4, the state has made several changes to unemployment insurance for those affected by COVID-19:
- The one-week waiting period for unemployment benefits is eliminated.
- All workers, including self-employed workers, "gig economy" workers and workers not usually eligible for benefits, may apply for unemployment benefits if:
  - they are unable to work because their employer has closed their work or reduced their hours as a result of COVID-19;
  - they or a family member they provide care for has been diagnosed with COVID-19 or is in quarantine or self-quarantine due to COVID-19;
  - or their work has been interrupted by the statewide school closures.
  - Employers will not be charged by NHES when one of their employees files an unemployment claim related to COVID-19.

Recent Changes to federal law grant all New Hampshire recipients of Unemployment Insurance benefits an additional \$600 per week until July 31, 2020. The maximum number of weeks someone can receive benefits has also been increased from 26 weeks to 39 weeks.

Self-employed applicants will receive a denial notice, which they can ignore, according to NHES. NHES will follow up with a phone call to obtain wage information and complete the claim. For more information see the governor's Executive Order

## Utilities

- For the duration of NH's State of Emergency, providers of electric, gas, telephone, cable, VOIP, internet and deliverable fuels like oil and propane are not allowed to disconnect or discontinue service for nonpayment.

- Customers who accrue arrearages during the emergency will be allowed to enter reasonable repayment agreements, with a minimum of 6 months to pay, after the end of the State of Emergency. Customers cannot be charged late fees on arrearages accrued during the State of Emergency.
- The Public Utility Commission's Consumer Services and External Affairs Division is available to assist customers of electric, gas and water utilities that are public utilities, as well as customers of competitive electric providers, and customers of telephone providers. Contact the office at [puc@puc.nh.gov](mailto:puc@puc.nh.gov)

Questions regarding other services – deliverable fuels, municipal utility service, or cable, internet or VOIP services – should be directed to the Attorney General's Consumer Protection Division at 603-271-3641 or by email at [DOJ-CPB@doj.nh.gov](mailto:DOJ-CPB@doj.nh.gov)

Customers who need assistance paying their electric bill can apply for the Electric Assistance Program (EAP) discount.

Customers who need assistance paying their heating bill can apply for Fuel Assistance Program (FAP) benefits.

For more information, see the governor's Executive Order

[Food Stamps/SNAP, WIC, Cash Assistance, Medicaid:](#)

- All local NH DHHS offices are closed to in-person visits until further notice.
- All interviews will be conducted by phone.
- To apply for benefits, visit <https://nheasy.nh.gov/#/> or call 1-844-275-3447.
- Individuals can apply for WIC by phone by contacting the closest local office.
- Find your local office here.
- If you're having trouble contacting your local office, leave a detailed voice message or call the WIC State Agency at 1-800-942-4321.
- Track, save and print anything you do online. Keep notes of any telephone contact with NH DHHS, including the date, time and who you spoke to.

DHHS will post program changes to their website weekly. Some eligibility rules for programs have changed, including:

- ABAWD time limit is temporarily waived for most SNAP/Food Stamp recipients;
- Mandatory employment and training rules are temporarily suspended for SNAP/Food Stamp and TANF recipients;
- Some SNAP/Food Stamp recipients may be eligible for additional benefits in April;
- Medicaid recipients can receive a 90-day supply of maintenance prescriptions and can seek to refill prescriptions early.
- Most recipients of DHHS benefits will not be required to complete a redetermination from March 18, 2020 to May 31, 2020. If you had a scheduled redetermination, it will likely be rescheduled for a later date. However, we recommend that you continue to notify DHHS of any changes during this time.

- Be aware of appeal deadlines. You can request an appeal by phone at (800) 852-3345, ext. 4292 or (603) 271-4292. You can also request an appeal by emailing DHHS.AAU@dhhs.nh.gov
  - An appeal request form is available online, but you do not need to complete one to request a hearing (<https://www.dhhs.nh.gov/oos/aa...> )
- Information about pending hearings:
  - If you have a hearing scheduled prior to March 27, 2020, the hearing will be postponed and you will be notified of a new hearing date.
  - Hearings scheduled between March 30, 2019 and April 17, 2020 are expected to go forward and will be conducted by phone.
  - If you cannot participate in your hearing by phone, contact the Administrative Appeals Unit immediately at (800) 852-3345, ext. 4292 or (603) 271-4292 or DHHS.AAU@dhhs.nh.gov
- For more information, visit the NH DHHS Website

## Domestic Violence

Victims may still go to their local Circuit Court to request domestic violence and stalking protection orders, or to make requests for emergency orders related to children.

Orders of protection and other types of temporary emergency orders that were scheduled to expire between April 7th and May 3, 2020 are extended until May 4, 2020 and/or the last day of the Declared State of Emergency. Victims should still request an extension of their final protective order prior to the May 4th date. Those requests can be made through the mail, and the Request for Extension form can be found on the Court's website.

Beginning April 7, almost all hearings (including protection order hearings) will be done over the phone. Notices will go out for any hearing that has been changed to a telephonic hearing. The notice should have instructions on how to call in, what to do with exhibits, witnesses, etc.

- Fillable versions of the DV and Stalking petitions are now online for survivors who are able to print forms and want to limit their wait at court. <https://www.courts.state.nh.us/fdpp/forms/alphaforms.htm>.
- Domestic Violence Petitions are sworn court documents under oath. Normally, these documents must be signed and sworn to, in person, in front of a notary public. However, during this current crisis, the State of New Hampshire is allowing notaries public to take oaths on these documents remotely.
  - There must be video and audio recording of the oath, which the notary must be able to save and archive.
  - The notary must have some way of confirming the signer's identity and taking the signer's oath that the statements are true.
  - Finally, the person signing the document must send the signed document to the notary for formal signature and affixing of the seal by the notary.

- In-person advocacy services may be reduced at crisis centers. Victims/survivors are encouraged to call 24/7 confidential statewide hotlines, which are still operating: § For domestic violence and stalking: 1-866-644-3574 § For sexual assault: 1-800-277-5570

Supervised visitation center updates:

- Strafford County Supervised Visitation Center: Visits are on hold while the center investigates alternatives for safe supervised visitation, including video visitation.
- Merrimack County Supervised Visitation Center: Shutdown through the end of March, in accordance with a county-wide shutdown of county-run facilities. Families and the courts have been notified.
- Waypoint SVC in Lebanon: Currently closed to private families but are investigating options for video or televisits.

## Housing

For the duration of NH's State of Emergency, currently scheduled to end May 4, 2020 a landlord may not file an eviction case in court.

Courts should not issue orders of eviction and sheriffs should not execute on writs of possession during the state of emergency.

If an eviction case was filed prior to the State of Emergency, which began March 17, 2020, a hearing cannot be held before May 4, 2020. The court will notify the tenant of the hearing date if the tenant has filed an appearance. Contact the Court Information Center at 1-855-212-1234 if you have questions about a specific case. Having the case number will be helpful to the Court Information Center.

The temporary eviction moratorium does NOT mean tenants don't have to pay rent. Tenants should make every effort to keep paying rent on time.

If you are unable to pay your rent, apply for help at your town or city's welfare office. You can contact the local welfare office first by phone or email to see if you can make an application without appearing in person at the town hall. [Click here for help on how to apply for local welfare](#)

Tenants who live in subsidized housing or have a housing choice voucher (Section 8) should notify the housing authority (or their landlord if there is no housing authority involved) of any loss of income. Give this notice in writing and keep a copy. Unless the loss of income is for only a brief time period, this will allow tenants to obtain a rent reduction.

## Foreclosure

Many federal agencies have suspended foreclosures during the COVID 19 crisis:

US Housing and Urban Development (HUD), which includes all reverse mortgages: until at least April 30, 2020.

US Rural Development Administration: until at least May 20, 2020.

Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac, which together insure about half of American home mortgages: until at least May 20, 2020.

Fannie and Freddie are also ordering lenders of loans that they insure to offer some form of relief to homeowners who are financially impacted by the virus.

Additionally, the New Hampshire State of Emergency declaration prohibits foreclosure proceedings for the duration of the State of Emergency.

If a homeowner has already received a foreclosure notice and feels emergency court relief is necessary, the NH Supreme Court Order suspending in-person court hearings (dated March 16, 2020) allows "proceedings related to petitions for temporary emergency injunctive relief."

Homeowners should continue working with housing counselors and others toward loss mitigation, since arrears will continue to grow during suspension of foreclosures.

Banks, credit unions and other financial institutions are considered "essential" operations and therefore should remain open, at least by telephone, even while the Governor's stay-at-home order is in effect.

For more information read the governor's Executive Order

### Property Taxes

There is NO across-the-state emergency order postponing deadlines for paying city and town property taxes, water or sewer bills. Interest continues to accrue at the usual rates.

There is NO across-the-state emergency order postponing the April 15 deadline for applying for the elderly exemption to reduce property taxes. To <https://www.revenue.nh.gov/forms/all-forms.htm>

Some cities and towns may make the decision to postpone the exemption application deadline on their own. For example, the City of Rochester has postponed the deadline to apply for the elderly exemption to June 15, 2020.

### Senior & Consumer Law

#### Nursing Facilities

If you or a loved one is in a nursing facility, the facility will be severely restricting visitors and making other changes to its operations. Some key changes include:

All visitors and non-essential health care personnel should be restricted from visitation, except for certain situations such as an end-of-life situations.

In lieu of visits, facilities should consider offering alternative means of communication such as:

- Virtual communications (phone, video-communication, etc.);

- Creating/increasing email communication;
- Assigning staff as primary contact to families for inbound calls and conducting regular outbound calls; and
- Offering a phone line with a regularly updated voice recording with the facility's general operating status.

#### Medicare

Procedures for certain Medicare appeals may be loosened during this time period. Please see the CMS guidance.

For more information, read the CMS Memorandum or the CMS Health Care Providers Fact Sheet

#### Consumer Protection

Please be aware of the many new scams happening due to the coronavirus. For more information go to the FTC website at: <https://www.consumer.ftc.gov/features/coronavirus-scams-what-ftc-doing>

#### Youth Law/Education

On March 12, 2020 the New Hampshire Board of Education passed an emergency rule allowing school districts to conduct remote instruction by staff and students in place of physical attendance in school. Schools have broad discretion to determine how such instruction will take place. Understandably, many parents and educators fear that students with disabilities will be particularly challenged to effectively participate in and benefit from remote learning plans. Education Commissioner Edelblut has proposed a variety of educational scenarios for students with disabilities:

- The services may be of a nature that they can be provided in a remote instructional environment;
- It may be possible to have a limited number of students continue to go to the school for specific services; and
- If schools are simply not able to provide necessary services, some students may wind up entitled to compensatory services once this public health crisis has resolved.

The NHDOE has issue follow up guidance specific to special education students. At this point schools continue to be responsible for special education evaluations. If your child is in the special education evaluation and/or identification process you should work with the school district to determine the best way to move forward, utilizing individual meetings and technology to the extent practicable. Click here for the most recent NHDOE special education guidance.

For more information visit the DOE Website

The U.S. Department of Education (USDOE) also released guidance specific to the COVID-19 pandemic. While not every scenario is covered in the USDOE guidance, it is a helpful resource to better understand your child's rights in this unique and evolving circumstance: "IEP teams may, but are not required to, include distance learning plans in a child's IEP that could be

triggered and implemented during a selective closure due to a COVID-19 outbreak. Such contingent provisions may include the provision of special education and related services at an alternate location; the provision of online or virtual instruction; instructional telephone calls; other curriculum-based instructional activities; and may identify which special education and related services, if any, could be provided at the child's home.

Creating a contingency plan before a COVID-19 outbreak occurs gives the child's service providers and the child's parents an opportunity to reach agreement as to what circumstances would trigger the use of the child's distance learning."

For more information, see the USDOE Guidance

The U.S. Department of Education Office of Civil Rights (OCR) has released a variety of information and resources for schools and school personnel to help schools address COVID-19 risks while protecting the civil rights of students with disabilities, including ensuring distance learning plans and remote learning tools are accessible to students with disabilities.