Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) about income supports and sickness leave benefits for seasonal workers

Due to the rapidly changing circumstances surrounding COVID-19 and its impact on workers, program support criteria are subject to change. Be sure to visit www.unifor.org/covid19 to download updated versions of this fact sheet.

As the effects of COVID-19 continue to ripple through the economy, many seasonal workers will be facing a shortage of work or temporary lay-offs, while others may need to undergo self-isolation or quarantine due to exposure to the virus.

If you are a seasonal worker who has been laid off or who cannot work due to COVID-19, this FAQ is for you.

Generally, you are a seasonal worker if:

• You are hired to work only during specific times of the year. Examples include agricultural work, lifeguarding, camp counselling, tour-guiding, etc.

If I contract the Coronavirus or have to self-isolate due to exposure, what income supports are available to me?

You are eligible for Employment Insurance (EI) sickness benefits if:

• You are currently self-isolating or undergoing quarantine due to COVID-19 (no doctor’s note or medical certificate is required).
• You have accumulated 600 insurable hours in the 52 weeks before the start of your claim (e.g. 20 weeks of work at 30 hours a week).
• You can demonstrate that your weekly earnings have declined by more than 40% for at least a week.

If you qualify, you can apply for EI sickness benefits online.

Note: If approved, your EI sickness benefits will mirror the recently announced Canada Emergency Response Benefit (CERB), which is equivalent to $500 per week for 16 weeks.
If you do not meet the above criteria but stopped working after March 15th due to COVID-19, you may be eligible for the Canada Emergency Response Benefit, which will provide up to 16 weeks of income support to those who do not qualify for EI benefits (see below).

**If I am laid off from work due to the COVID-19 crisis, can I access Employment Insurance?**

Yes, you are eligible for regular EI benefits if you have accumulated the required amount of insurable hours during the qualifying period.

- For most workers, the qualifying period will be the previous 52 weeks, unless you have already applied for EI within the past year.
- The required number of insurable hours ranges from 420 to 700 hours depending on your region. You can look up the number of hours needed by postal code here.

Seasonal workers in specific regions may be eligible for five additional weeks of benefits.

Make sure that your Record of Employment (ROE) has been forwarded to Service Canada or has been submitted electronically by your employer. You will need a My Service Canada Account to view your ROE electronically. You do not, however, need your ROE before applying for EI.

You can apply for regular EI benefits online as soon as possible.

Note: if approved, your EI benefits will initially mirror the recently announced Canada Emergency Response Benefit (CERB), which provides the equivalent of $500 per week for 16 weeks. After 16 weeks, your regular EI payments will resume as normal as long as you continue to qualify.

**What if I am unable to find seasonal work because of the COVID-19 crisis?**

If you do not meet the above requirements, you may be eligible for the recently announced Canada Emergency Response Benefit, which will provide up to 16 weeks of income support to those who do not qualify for regular EI benefits. Seasonal workers who are not currently working and anticipate that they will be unable to find seasonal work because of the crisis must meet the following eligibility criteria:

- You have exhausted or will exhaust your regular EI benefits between December 29, 2019 and October 3, 2020.
- You had a total income of at least $5,000 from all sources in 2019 or in the 12 months immediately preceding the application.
- You have had $1,000 or less in income for at least 14 consecutive days in the initial four week period for which you are applying.
- You continue to earn $1,000 or less in income during each subsequent four-week period.

If eligible, you can apply for the CERB through the Canada Revenue Agency (CRA) online or by phone at 1-800-959-2019 or 1-800-959-2041.
The CRA is suggesting that applicants use the following guidelines for when to apply:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Month of Birth</th>
<th>Apply for the CERB on</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>January, February, or March</td>
<td>Mondays</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April, May, or June</td>
<td>Tuesdays</td>
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<tr>
<td>July, August or September</td>
<td>Wednesday</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October, November, or September</td>
<td>Thursdays</td>
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<tr>
<td>Any month</td>
<td>Fridays, Saturdays, or Sundays</td>
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**What is the difference between EI and the CERB?**

Employment Insurance and the CERB are two distinct benefits administered separately.

To help process an unprecedented number of EI claims, the federal government established the Employment Insurance Emergency Response Benefit to mirror the benefits provided in the CERB. Over the coming months, EI regular and sickness benefit payments will be the same as the CERB (equivalent to $500 per week), although the payment schedule and other requirements (e.g. submitting biweekly EI reports) will remain different. This is why the government’s CERB website will direct you to an EI application page if it determines that you are eligible for EI benefits.

Regular EI benefits paid to eligible workers who apply on or after March 15 will mirror CERB payments for the first 16 weeks, but will revert to regular EI payments afterwards as long as the claimant continues to qualify for EI.

Those who do not qualify for EI regular or sickness benefits but who meet the CERB eligibility criteria will apply through the Canada Revenue Agency (CRA) and receive a lump sum payment of $2,000 every four weeks for up to 16 weeks. Applicants must confirm their eligibility for each four-week period.

**When should I apply for EI or the CERB?**

If you qualify, you can apply for EI sickness benefits or regular EI benefits online as soon as possible. Be sure not to wait too long as some of your benefits may be lost if you delay your application.

Those who don’t qualify for EI but are eligible for the CERB should apply as soon as they have experienced, or know they will experience, 14 consecutive days or more with $1,000 or less in income.

**If I have questions about applying for Employment Insurance, who can I contact?**

For questions about applying for EI, call the EI telephone information service at 1-800-206-7218 from 8:30 am to 4:30 pm Monday to Friday and press “0” to talk to a representative. Please note that call volumes are high at the present time and you may be placed on hold.

For questions about applying for the CERB through the Canada Revenue Agency, call 1-800-959-8281 Monday to Friday, 8am to 11pm (local time).
Are there other special income support measures available to me?

Residents of **British Columbia** who are unable to work due to COVID-19 and have applied for the CERB may be eligible for the **B.C. Emergency Benefit for Workers**, a one-time, tax-free payment of $1,000. Details about the benefit and eligibility criteria will be announced soon.

Residents of **Saskatchewan** who must self-isolate may get financial assistance from a **Self-Isolation Support Program** which will provide $450 per week, for a maximum of two weeks or $900. The Self-Isolation Support Program is targeted at Saskatchewan residents forced to self-isolate that are not covered by other programs and supports. Applications will be accepted until June 30th.

For more COVID-19 related worker support information, visit [www.unifor.org/covid19](http://www.unifor.org/covid19)

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