



Washington State Coronavirus Response (COVID-19)

Economic Resiliency Team - Joint Information Center, Camp Murray

The *Business and Workers* newsletter provides weekly updates to help businesses and workers navigate the COVID-19 pandemic. It is compiled by the Economic Resiliency Team (ERT), part of the Joint Information Center.

"Safe Start" Guidance Posted for Phase 1, some Phase 2 sectors

Phase 1 Guidance issued; covers construction, vehicle sales, drive-in spiritual services, car washes, landscaping, pet walking, and curbside retail.

May 5 kicked off Phase 1 of the [four-phase "Safe Start" process](#) to safely reopen Washington's economy. [Phase 1](#) permits some construction activity, outdoor activity, park access, drive-in spiritual service, landscaping, car washes, vehicle sales, pet walking, and retail sales with curbside pickup.

Statewide advancement to Phase 2 may occur on, but not before, June 1 if the [risk assessment](#) is satisfactory to public health officials. [Phase 2](#) permits outdoor recreation, manufacturing, construction, domestic services, retail, real estate, professional services, nail salons, barbers, pet grooming, and restaurants (all with strict safety measures). Each phase will last for a minimum of 3 weeks.

Business activity guidance for all Phase 1 activities and several Phase 2 activities (retail, manufacturing, dine-in restaurants, taverns) has been posted online. Review [Phase 1 and Phase 2 Business Activity Guidelines](#) on the Governor's Website.

8 Counties Jump to Phase 2 in "Safe Start" Reopen Process

Columbia, Garfield, Lincoln, Ferry, Pend Oreille, Skamania, Stevens and Wahkiakum counties advanced to Phase 2 through County Variance Applications.

Visit the [County Variance page](#) on the Washington Coronavirus Website.

New Contact Tracing Initiative Announced

A trained team will conduct voluntary interviews to slow the spread of the virus.

The contact tracing program may be of special note to restaurants. Under [Phase 2 guidance](#), restaurants that offer table service must maintain a daily log of customers, their check-in time, and their contact information to facilitate contact tracing. Review the [Contact Tracing Announcement](#) on the Governor Inslee's Medium page.

Fraudulent Unemployment Claims On the Rise

The Employment Security Department (ESD) warns of fraudulent strategies that exploit the pandemic.

There are reports of a national surge in fraudulent unemployment claims. ESD's Office of Special Investigations warns of a dramatic rise in imposter fraud in Washington State.

Imposter fraud includes false claims filed with stolen personal information. There are reports of fake websites designed to steal personal information. ESD does not request sensitive information outside of their official, secure website. Any site that requests confidential information should be treated with suspicion.

This malicious and criminal activity is harmful. Investigations of false claims slow processing of legitimate claims. ESD is rapidly scaling its anti-fraud efforts by securing data, hiring agents, and facilitating reporting.

A victim is not responsible to pay back benefits issued to a fraudster. ESD has a system to process benefits to individuals that file for unemployment after having been impersonated.

Victims of unemployment fraud should report to ESD:

- Reporting Unemployment Benefits Fraud: [LINK](#)

Victims of identity theft should report to the IRS:

- Guide to Employment-Related Identity Theft: [LINK](#)

ESD Commits to *Operation 100%*

The Employment Security Department (ESD) expands staff to tackle unprecedented claim volume, resolves to review all applications.

ESD has paid out over \$2 billion in benefits to more than half a million Washingtonians since the crisis began. This money is feeding families and paying bills for many, but ESD acknowledges that 57,000 applicants are still waiting for their claims to be reviewed.

ESD's objective is to provide relief to all eligible Washingtonians. The Department has launched [Operation 100%](#), their plan to accelerate processing and quickly distribute benefits to those eligible.

The plan involves rapid hiring of staff, new technology, and triage of phone traffic. ESD's top priority is to clear the backlog. ESD will also email another 187,000 eligible individuals that have tasks to complete before claims can be processed.

The objectives of *Operation 100%* are to make substantially reduce the backlog by late May, and to have 100% of the backlog resolved or paid by mid-June. Washington can observe the progress of *Operation 100%* on [ESD's website](#).

ESD to Temporarily Limit Inbound Calls to Focus on Backlog

ESD to limit calls May 13-19 to prioritize backlog of applications with complex claims.

Read ESD's [full news release](#) or watch [Commissioner Suzi LeVine's message](#).

Drive-In WiFi Hotspots Pop Up Statewide

300 free community WiFi hotspots launch across Washington to offer internet access during pandemic.

Hundreds of [free WiFi access points](#) have been launched statewide to facilitate internet access to Washingtonians. These hotspots improve equitable access to distance learning, remote work, telemedicine, and essential information.

These hotspots will typically be staged in parking lots at central locations statewide, including a number of rural sites. Some sites may offer limited indoor public access with social distancing and hygiene rules in place.

Broadband equity is not just a rural challenge. The hotspot project supports underserved and economically disadvantaged communities in urban and suburban areas as well.

"The COVID-19 pandemic is shining a light on what was already a challenge for the state – delivering broadband connectivity to all Washington citizens and businesses. This crisis has highlighted broadband not as a luxury, but as critical infrastructure for all," said Washington State Broadband Office Director Russ Elliott.

CARES Act Funding to Support Local Governments

State Department of Commerce to distribute \$300 Million in federal CARES Act funds to local governments.

Read the [full news release](#) on the Department of Commerce website.

Business Response Center

Submit general questions about reopening, health and safety, and relief programs

- The ERT Business Response Center has resolved 2,200 questions since April 8. The team is standing by to respond to questions as quickly as they come in.
- [Submit a question to the Business Response Center](#).

Informative Programming

Association of Washington Business COVID-19 Webinar

- Q&A about Washington's reopen with representatives from the Office of the Governor, Department of Commerce, Employment Security Department, and the Department of Labor and Industries. ([May 8](#))

TVW's *The Impact: Road to Recovery* series

- Q&A with Chris Gregoire, Former WA Governor & Challenge Seattle CEO ([LINK](#))
- Q&A with Jan Gee, CEO of the Washington Food Industry Association ([LINK](#))

"The economy returns once consumer confidence returns. Consumer confidence is based on the hope, the belief, and the fact that we are on solid ground."

Chris Gregoire, former Washington State governor and CEO of Challenge Seattle