FAMILY VOICES® of Minnesota

Facts About Essential Services During the Covid-19 Outbreak

In Minnesota, Governor Walz has issued Peacetime Emergency Orders that provide some assistance and safeguards for families whose incomes have been reduced because of the COVID-19 outbreak.

Financial

If you are having trouble paying your bills, it is your responsibility to contact each company and ask for assistance.

- **Unemployment**
  - From March 16, 2020 through the end of the peacetime emergency, the typical waiting week for unemployment has been suspended. Unemployment is available to individuals who are unable to work due to circumstances that were no fault of their own, including reasons related to COVID-19.
  - More and frequently updated information is available at https://www.uimn.org/applicants/needtoknow/news-updates/covid-19.jsp.

- **General Cash Assistance** (Cash Benefit for Qualified Individuals without children): https://mn.gov/dhs/people-we-serve/seniors/economic-assistance/income/programs-and-services/ga.jsp.

- **Utilities (Power, Gas, Phone Service, Internet, Cell Service)**
  - Utility providers have suspended all utility disconnects. ***Check with your utility provider for assistance.***
    - Xcel Energy https://www.xcelenergy.com/covid-19_response
    - Minnesota Power https://www.mnpower.com/CustomerService/Covid19Updates
    - CenterPoint Energy https://www.centerpointenergy.com/en-us/Corp/Pages/COVID-19.aspx
  - Additional assistance may be available from the MN Energy Assistance Program: (Direct Benefit Energy Payment for Low-Income Residents): https://mn.gov/commerce/consumers/consumer-assistance/energy-assistance/.

  - Many telephone, internet and cell providers have signed the *"Keep America Connected Pledge"* and are responding by not disconnecting services, and/or making special payment plans available. In addition, many providers are opening public hotspots and offering free wifi for students and low-income families.
    - Comcast is opening its Xfinity WiFi Network nationally for free, offering unlimited data for free, connecting low-income families to free internet learning. https://corporate.comcast.com/covid-19
    - AT&T is suspending the termination of wireless, home phone or broadband service when customers can't pay their bills because of coronavirus disruptions. The company is also waiving related late fees. AT&T is also providing free access to its public WiFi hotspots. https://about.att.com/pages/COVID-19.html

This document was prepared with support from the Family Support and Connections Grant funded through the MN Department of Health.

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- Verizon is waiving late fees and suspending service termination for customers "negatively impacted by the global crisis." https://www.verizon.com/about/news/update-verizon-serve-customers-covid-19
- T-Mobile is providing unlimited data to all current customers who have plans with data for the next 60 days. It will also provide additional data to mobile hotspot users. https://www.t-mobile.com/news/t-mobile-update-on-covid-19-response

- Arvig New customers in homes with K-12 or college students can sign up for free internet, including Wi-Fi if needed, with Arvig. The service will be free until the school year resumes. https://www.arvigbusiness.com/news/covid19response/
- Charter Spectrum broadband subscription can get free broadband and Wi-Fi for 60 days with the installation fees waived. Low-income households without children may still be eligible for the Spectrum Internet Assist. https://corporate.charter.com/newsroom/charter-to-offer-free-access-to-spectrum-broadband-and-wifi-for-60-days-for-new-K12-and-college-student-households-and-more

- **Housing**
  - From March 24, 2020 through the end of the peacetime emergency, landlords and mortgage holders cannot remove people from properties. Willfully violating this order will lead to a misdemeanor charge and up to $1000.00 fine. https://www.lawhelpmn.org/self-help-library/fact-sheet/covid-19-renters-rights-and-court-changes-during-pandemic
  - Minnesota Housing Assistance (short and long term financial assistance):http://www.mnhousing.gov/sites/Satellite?c=Page&cid=1358904931809&d=Touch&pagename=External%2FPage%2FEXTStandardLayout
  - Minnesota Supplemental Aid Housing Assistance (housing assistance for people with disabilities paying less than or equal to 40% of monthly income for housing): https://mn.gov/dhs/people-we-serve/adults/economic-assistance/housing/programs-and-services/msa-housing.jsp
  - Minnesota Foreclosure Assistance and Mortgage Help: http://www.mnhousing.gov/sites/Satellite?c=Page&cid=1358905024221&d=Touch&pagename=External%2FPage%2FEXTStandardLayout

Food Assistance

- Supplemental food during school closures
  - The Minnesota Department of Education has a list of questions and answers related to meeting families' nutritional needs while schools are closed. Some schools continue to provide meals via meal pick-up or delivery. Other food sources have also been identified. Information available here https://education.mn.gov/MDE/dse/health/covid19/fnscovid19/index.htm
  - Hunger Solutions is collecting information on where families and kids can go to get a free meal during Minnesota's statewide school closures. http://www.hungersolutions.org/2020/03/16/meals-for-kids-during-covid-19-closings/

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- Minnesota Family Investment Program (Cash and Food Assistance for Families with Children: http://www.benefits.gov/benefit/1666.
- Minnesota Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (SNAP/WIC): https://www.health.state.mn.us/people/wic/localagency/infosystem/hubert/mnwicapp/index.html.
- Minnesota Food Assistance Program (Food Assistance Program for nor those not eligible for SNAP): https://www.welfareinfo.org/benefits/the-minnesota-food-assistance-program-mfap-1584.

Childcare

- School districts have been asked to provide childcare to elementary age children whose parents are "front line" or "essential" employees. This includes many health care workers, pharmacists, grocery store workers, delivery people, and others. Information can be found here. https://mn.gov/mmb/childcare/families/
- In addition, Governor Walz announced that Minnesota will partner with the YMCA to provide care for the school-age children of emergency workers in Minnesota. Thirty-eight locations across Minnesota will open to provide access to distance learning and care to children in kindergarten through sixth grade, coordinating with school districts.
- A full list of locations is available at ymcamn.org/mnchildcare. The cost is $40 per day and locations will coordinate with school districts on food drop-off sites. Registration is open and accessible at ymcamn.org/mnchildcare or 612-230-9622.
- Childcare providers that serve younger children have also been instructed to continue to remain open for frontline and essential workers, and legislation is currently proposed to help these providers maintain economic viability during this time.

Health Insurance

- Due to the disruption that COVID-19 has caused in the lives of Minnesota families, the MN Department of Human Services has currently ceased renewal and closure notices for Minnesotans on CHIP, Medical Assistance, and MinnesotaCare. Enrollment in the programs continues during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Some clinic systems have moved toward virtual visits, including e-visits, televisits and video visits. Some clinic systems are moving toward well child only clinics for the continuation of needed vaccinations and other well child related medical matters. Recent insurance changes in response to COVID-19 provide coverage for these visits.
- Copays, deductibles and other expenses related to COVID-19 have, for most plans, been eliminated.
- MNSure: A 30-day special enrollment period for MNSure has been introduced for those who qualify. This allows those who qualify, to to sign up for health insurance coverage through MNsure, beginning Monday, March 23, through Tuesday, April 21.

Family Voices of MN is a free, parent-run organization providing information, resources and peer to peer support for families who have children with special health needs or disabilities. Minnesota families are facing unprecedented challenges right now. **Family Voices of MN is here and waiting to help**. connected@familyvoicesmn.org | Talk/Text 612-440-1609 | webchat www.familyvoicesofminnesota.org.

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