I’ve lost my job due to COVID-19 and/or the quarantine. What can I do?

Contact the Texas Workforce Commission for unemployment assistance. You can apply online or call their call center at 1-800-939-6631. Call center hours are M-F 8:00 to 6:00 and are expanding to Saturday this week.

I can’t get through to the call center or the website – what can I do?

Please be patient. The volumes of calls and visits to the website have been overwhelming, so please try again at a different time if you are unable to get through.

When do unemployment assistance benefits start?

As soon as the paperwork is finalized.

Will the State increase the number of days allowed for unemployment assistance?

As of now, no. There is no provision to increase the allowed unemployment assistance from the current 26 weeks. There are bills in process, but they have not gone through yet.

What ways are TWC helping those unable to find work during the quarantine? What changes have been made to the application process?

TWC has suspended the work search requirement and the week waiting period. Additionally, if you have been overpaid in the past, normally it would be deducted from current benefits before you receive benefit. They just changed the rules and they will not be collecting any overpayment before paying.

Are self-employed or independent workers eligible for unemployment benefits from TWC?

At this time, no. Self-employed and independent workers do not qualify for unemployment benefits. There is a bill working its way through Congress that will address assistance for the self-employed and independent contractors.
How do I know if I am classified as an employee or as an independent contractor?

The three essential elements of the definition of employment are service, wages, and direction and control. Direction and control can be present in an employment relationship even if the employer does not exercise direction and control, but retains the right to do so.

You can use this PDF as a comparison between employment and contract work for further clarification: https://twc.texas.gov/files/businesses/form-c-8-employment-status-comparative-approach-tw.pdf

How do I know what my work classification is?

The Texas Workforce Commission offers guidance with questions about the classification of workers. Contact your nearest TWC tax office for assistance: https://twc.texas.gov/unemployment-tax-contact-information

Can TWC handle the volume of applications and calls? What steps are they taking to prevent a loss of service?

Yes. Currently, TWC has four call centers across the state. Each one is able to take 13,000 calls in one of their call centers on average. However, the COVID-19 outbreak has created a flood of new claims and contacts (example: on March 22 alone, they took over 100,000 calls).

What steps have been taken by TWC to prevent loss of service?

TWC has done the following:
- moved staff from other divisions to the call centers
- temporarily hired 100 additions staff
- expanded hours

Additionally, they are working to increase server capacity and increase the number of servers in operation to help with the website.

Can tipped worker count their tips toward unemployment benefits?

Yes if the tips were reported by your employer.

How many unemployment claims were there in March?

As of now, there has been an increase from 3,000 – 9,000 claims a day to 25,000. In the past week alone, there were 150,000. However, do not let the numbers dissuade you from applying for assistance if it is needed – TWC has the capacity to help as many people as necessary.
With this number of new claims and people affected, is there enough funding available to TWC to help everyone who is accepted?

Yes. There is enough funding now, and TWC will seek additional funding from the Federal government if necessary.