



# ATTENTION COUNTY EMPLOYEES: IMPORTANT INFORMATION ABOUT RESOURCES THAT MAY BE AVAILABLE TO YOU (COVID-19)

Many County employees are eligible to telework during the COVID-19 crisis, but if you are a County employee who is unable to work or telework due to COVID-19, these new benefits may be valuable options for you. Consider whether the income stability of teleworking while “Staying Well At Home” outweighs the benefits of these new programs.

## COUNTY OF VENTURA NATURAL DISASTER EMERGENCY PAY

The Board of Supervisors approved Natural Disaster Emergency Pay of up to 80 hours for County employees with absences related to COVID-19 during the period of March 4 through April 4, 2020. An additional 80 hours was subsequently approved for absences from April 5 through April 18, 2020, and additional 40 hours was approved for absences from April 19, 2020, through the end of the declared COVID-19 emergency. This paid time is meant to assist you if you must stay home, cannot telework, and otherwise would have to use accrued time during the COVID-19 crisis. This paid time is meant to run concurrently with any benefits available to you under the Emergency Paid Sick Leave Act (EPSL) and the Emergency Family & Medical Leave Expansion Act, which are both a part of the Families First Coronavirus Response Act (see below). To receive this benefit, complete the applicable Natural Disaster Attestation Form and have it approved by your manager and agency/department head. The Attestation Form lists the eligibility requirements and is available on the CEO-HR/Benefits COVID-19 Resources webpage (<https://hr.ventura.org/benefits>).

## FAMILIES FIRST CORONAVIRUS RESPONSE ACT

The Families First Coronavirus Response Act (FFCRA or Act) allows paid sick leave and expanded family and medical leave for specified COVID-19-related reasons. These provisions will apply from April 1, 2020 through December 31, 2020. Some highlights are:

### *Emergency Paid Sick Leave (EPSL)*

You can receive EPSL at your regular rate of pay if you cannot work or telework because you:

- Are subject to a federal, state, or local quarantine or isolation order related to COVID-19;
- Have been advised by a health care provider to self-quarantine due to concerns related to COVID-19; or
- Are experiencing symptoms of COVID-19 and are seeking a medical diagnosis.

You may receive pay up to a normal number of your scheduled hours over a two-week period. As a one-time benefit, all eligible employees may take EPSL and use it prior to using other available leave time.

EPSL is capped at \$511 per day and \$5,110 in total.

If you're eligible, you may take EPSL at two-thirds of your regular rate of pay if you cannot work or telework because you are:

- Caring for an individual who is subject to a federal, state, or local quarantine or isolation order related to COVID-19, or who has been advised by a health care provider to self-quarantine due to concerns related to COVID-19;
- Caring for your minor child whose school or place of care is closed, or if your child's care provider is unavailable, due to COVID-19 precautions; or
- Experiencing any other substantially similar condition as specified by federal officials.

EPSL taken for these reasons is capped at \$200 per day and \$2,000 in total.

### *FMLA Public Health Emergency Leave*

If you are an eligible employee employed for at least 30 days, this new FMLA provision will allow you to take up to 12 weeks of emergency leave if you cannot work or telework because you must care for your minor child due to your child's school or place of care being closed due to COVID-19 or your child's care provider is unavailable due to COVID-19.

This emergency leave provision will provide paid time after the initial two weeks (10 days) of leave. During the next ten weeks of emergency leave, you would be entitled to two-thirds of your regular rate of pay. The paid portion of the emergency leave caps at \$200 per day and \$10,000 in total.

This emergency leave will not give you an additional 12 weeks of FMLA leave if you have already exhausted the 12-week FMLA entitlement during the current calendar year.



## EMPLOYEE EMERGENCY ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

The County's Employee Emergency Assistance Program (EEAP) can help County employees and retirees who need emergency financial assistance. Comprised of representatives from all bargaining units and management, the EEAP Committee administers the program. Find additional information, including recipient application and donation forms, on the CEO-HR/Benefits website: <https://hr.ventura.org/benefits/employee-emergency-assistance-program>.

## THE CORONAVIRUS AID, RELIEF, AND ECONOMIC SECURITY (CARES) ACT

Enacted on March 27, 2020, this new legislation includes the following provisions that may apply to you:

- An increase in unemployment compensation benefits - includes an additional \$600 per week payment to each recipient of Unemployment Insurance or Pandemic Unemployment Assistance for up to four months.
- Direct financial assistance payments to qualifying individuals - providing one-time, direct financial assistance payments of \$1,200 to individuals with Adjusted Gross Income (AGI) up to \$75,000 or \$2,400 for married couples with combined AGI up to \$150,000. Payments would increase by an additional \$500 per qualifying child. The rebate amount is reduced by \$5 for each \$100 that a taxpayer's income exceeds the phase-out threshold. The Internal Revenue Service (IRS) will administer these payments. The payments will function as fully refundable tax credits, meaning individuals with no taxable income as well as those whose income comes entirely from non-taxable means-tested benefit programs will qualify for assistance. The IRS will determine benefit levels and eligibility using 2019 income tax filings and 2018 tax data and Social Security data when 2019 filings are not available.
- Over-the-Counter (OTC) Drugs and Menstrual Care Products: removes the Affordable Care Act restriction on the use of flexible spending account (FSA) and health savings account (HSA) funds for the purchase of OTC drugs/medicines and adds menstrual care products to the list of eligible OTC items. Effective for expenses incurred on or after January 1, 2020, consumers may use FSA and HSA funds to pay for OTC drugs without a prescription and menstrual care products. The OTC and menstrual care product measures do not have an expiration date.
- Short-term relief for federally-owned student loans - requires the Secretary of Education to defer federally-owned student loan payments, principal and interest for six months, through September 30, 2020, without penalty to the borrowers. This provides relief for over 95 percent of student loan borrowers.

## OTHER RESOURCES

- *State disability & unemployment benefits* - [https://www.edd.ca.gov/about\\_edd/coronavirus-2019.htm](https://www.edd.ca.gov/about_edd/coronavirus-2019.htm)
- *County disability benefits & leave of absence information* - <https://hr.ventura.org/benefits/absence-management-disability-plans>
- *County Employee Assistance Program (mental wellness assistance)* - <https://hr.ventura.org/benefits/employee-assistance-program>
- *County Benefits contact info:*
  - Website - <https://hr.ventura.org/benefits>
  - Email - [Benefits.ServiceRep@ventura.org](mailto:Benefits.ServiceRep@ventura.org)
  - Phone - (805) 654-2570

