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FINANCIAL & BENEFITS

**What Do I Do If I'm Laid Off?  
What Are the EI Rules?  
What Do I Do About My Benefits?**

Wieggers Financial & Benefits prepared **THIS BULLETIN** to address these and other questions related to the COVID-19 pandemic. PLEASE read it thoroughly as most, if not all, of the information is critical.

# Premier Announces Financial Support Plan for Saskatchewan Employers and Employees

On Friday, Premier Scott Moe announced a significant financial support plan for Saskatchewan employers and employees hit by the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic.

“During this time of great uncertainty, it is of the utmost importance that Saskatchewan people know their government is here to provide support,” Moe said. “This plan supports businesses and employees. Most importantly, it supports the opportunity to come back to work when we emerge from the COVID-19 crisis.”

The financial support plan outlines a number of mechanisms for reducing costs for businesses and individuals, providing support to self-employed individuals not covered by new federal support measures, and establishes a Business Response Team designated to support Saskatchewan businesses during this time of uncertainty.

## **Self-Isolation Support Program**

Administered by the Ministry of Finance, the Self-Isolation Support Program 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 recent federally announced employment insurance programs and other supports. The program is designed to ensure that all Saskatchewan residents are covered by either a federal or provincial program to ensure no one is faced with choosing to work instead of protecting their family and community from COVID-19 by self-isolating.

The program is anticipated to cost a total of \$10 million and will mostly benefit self-employed residents of Saskatchewan that meet the following eligibility criteria:

- They have contracted COVID-19 or are showing symptoms
- They have been in contact with an individual infected with COVID-19
- They have recently returned from international travel and have been required to self-isolate

**AND**

- If they are not eligible for compensation including sick leave, vacation leave from their employer
- If they do not have private insurance covering such disruptions
- If they are not covered by other programs such as federal employment insurance that has been updated.

**Three Month PST Remittance Deferral and Audit Suspension**

Effective immediately, Saskatchewan businesses that are unable to remit their PST due to cashflow concerns will have relief from penalty and interest charges. Over the course of these three-months, government estimates a potential deferral of up to \$750 million in PST collections. Businesses that are unable to file their provincial tax return(s) by the due date may submit a request for relief from penalty and interest charges on the return(s) affected.

At this time, audit program and compliance activities have been suspended to allow businesses time to focus on the health and safety of their customers and staff, reduce impacts to their business operations, and minimize the spread of the virus through reduced audit travel.

**Crown Utility Interest Deferral Programs**

Earlier this week, government announced a crown utility interest deferral program waving interest on late bill payments for up to six months. Effective immediately,



the crown utility interest deferral program is available to all crown utility customers.

### **Student Loan Repayment Moratorium**

Effective immediately, a six-month student loan repayment moratorium has been put in place, mirroring a similar federal provision. This provides individuals with student loans immediate relief, and comes at a \$4 million cost to the provincial government.

### **Changes to Employment Standard Regulations**

In addition to changes made to changes to *The Saskatchewan Employment Act* that introduced a new unpaid public health emergency leave and removed the 13-week employment requirement to access sick leave and the requirement for a doctor's note to access sick leave, *The Employment Standard Regulations* have been amended to:

- Ensure that during a public emergency, businesses will not have to provide notice or pay in lieu of notice when they lay-off staff if it is for a period of 12 weeks or less in a 16-week period.
- And if an employer lays off employees periodically for a total of more than 12 weeks in a 16-week period, the employees are considered to be terminated and are entitled to pay instead of notice as outlined in the Act. This will be calculated from the date on which the employee was laid off.

These amendments create a balance for employers and employees where the difficult decision may be made to lay-off employees due to public health emergencies. In this circumstance, employees would have immediate access to new federal employment insurance programs, while keeping employers financially stable to ensure employees have a job to return to.

### **Business Response Team to be Established**

To provide support to Saskatchewan businesses seeking to navigate the uncertain conditions caused by COVID-19, the Government of Saskatchewan will be establishing a single window information webpage for businesses to access information and receive timely updates on provincial support initiatives. This will be complemented by the establishment of a Business Response Team, led by the Ministry of Trade and Export Development, which will work with businesses to identify program supports relevant to particular businesses. Once the Business Response Team has been established, contact information will be communicated to the public, and to local chambers of commerce for dissemination to chamber membership.

For more information, contact:

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You received this email because it includes important information related to the COVID-19 pandemic. PLEASE stay safe!



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