

Maine's Employment Leave for Caregivers and Persons Affected by Public Health Emergencies covers employees who are either themselves affected or who are caring for an immediate family member who is affected by a public health emergency.

Being affected by a public health emergency means undergoing treatment or being in quarantine or isolation, among other things. The need for leave must be communicated to the employer within a reasonable timeframe.

Leave may be either paid or unpaid. Exceptions include government employees who are responsible for ensuring public health and safety and employees whose leave would cause an undue hardship requiring the employer to downsize operations.

Maine's Family Medical Leave laws apply to an employee that has worked for the same employer for at least 12 consecutive months. The employee would be entitled to up to 10 work weeks of job-protected unpaid Family Medical Leave in any two years. However, employers with fewer than 15 employees employed at a permanent work site are exempt. Employers may provide paid leave at their discretion.

Maine's Family Sick Leave law states that if an employer provides paid leave, then the employer must allow an employee to use the paid leave for the care of an immediate family member who is ill. This law gives the employee the right to choose what type of leave they are going to use, if their employer provides multiple benefits (such as sick, vacation, or personal) with limitations. This law section does not apply to the illness of the employee, for which the employer may require the use of sick leave.

Larger businesses, such as those that have 50 or more employees, are also subject to the federal Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA) laws. This requires that up to 12 weeks of unpaid leave be provided for a qualifying event. Employers may provide paid leave at their discretion.

U.S. Department of Labor FAQ's about federal FMLA:

<https://www.dol.gov/agencies/whd/fmla/pandemic>

Maine's Earned Paid Leave law does not go into effect until January 1, 2021. This law, when in effect, will provide the ability for employees to accrue up to 40 hours of paid time off, based on the number of hours they work for an employer.

Work-Related Illness - If the illness is work related, the employee and employer should consult with the Maine Workers' Compensation Board. For more information about the Worker's Compensation Board, visit <https://www.maine.gov/wcb/>

For more information, please visit <https://www.maine.gov/labor/bls/index.shtml>

Frequently Asked Questions:

Q. I am salary-exempt. Does my employer have to pay my full salary if the business is closed due to COVID-19?

A: If the salary-exempt employee worked any part of the week then the employee must receive their full salary. The employer can require the employee use their paid benefit time such as vacation, sick, personal, etc. If the salary-exempt employee doesn't have time available, the employer is still required to pay the full salary for the remainder of that week. If the business is closed for subsequent week(s) and the salary-exempt employee does not work at all during the week then the employer would not be required to pay any portion of the salary.

Q. I am an hourly employee (non-exempt). Does my employer have to pay me if the business closed due to COVID-19?

A: No. Employers are only required to pay non-exempt employees for time actually worked. Whether or not the employee can use their paid benefit time such as vacation, sick, personal, etc. is solely at the discretion of the employer.

Q. Can a minor work additional hours if their school is closed due to COVID-19?

A: No. In most cases, schools have closed their buildings, but the students are still required to do daily assignments remotely. Therefore, school is still considered "in session."

Q: Will the Bureau of Labor Standards at the Maine Department of Labor ask for information about my immigration status?

A: As far as the Bureau of Labor Standards is concerned, a worker is a worker. We do not ask for immigration status or a social security number when responding to worker inquiries or complaints. We enforce Maine's labor laws without regard to whether an employee has work authorization or is undocumented.

Q: How long can I take leave under Maine's Employment Leave for Caregivers and Persons Affected by Public Health Emergencies?

A: This leave only applies during the State of Civil Emergency declared by the governor. It continues for a reasonable and necessary time after the emergency has ended for people that have contracted COVID-19 or were exposed to COVID-19 during the State of Civil Emergency.

Q: Can an employer refuse to bring me back to work if I take leave under Maine's Employment Leave for Caregivers and Persons Affected by Public Health Emergencies, or one of the other leave laws?

A: It would not be lawful for an employer to terminate employment because you are taking leave under one of these laws. However, Maine is an employment at-will state. At-will employment means that, absent a union contract or individual employment contract, an employer is free to terminate an employee at any time and for any reason, as long as the reason is not discriminatory, and it is not specifically prohibited in statute.