

# COVID-19: UNEMPLOYMENT UPDATE



Data and Information current as of May 21, 2020

By Leslie Rubin and Stephanie Bryant  
www.montgomerycountymd.gov/olo

## NEW UNEMPLOYMENT CLAIMS

Federal data from the U.S. Department of Labor (USDOL) show that new weekly unemployment claims fell in Maryland again last week. For the week of May 16, 2020, new Maryland UI claims fell by 25% from the prior week, to 45,485. The US and Maryland data in the table for past weeks reflect revised numbers from the Labor Department.

\*\* Both the U.S. and Maryland Departments of Labor report new unemployment claims for states on a weekly basis. The data typically are very close in number, with Maryland reporting “transitional claims” and the USDOL not including those claims.

Beginning with the data for May 2, USDOL and Maryland data diverged significantly. We are still investigating the root of the discrepancies and will update these data when we can.

Week of 2020	US (SA)	MD (NSA)	MoCo*
<b>May 16</b>	<b>2,438,000</b>	<b>34,304**</b>	<b>**</b>
May 9	2,981,000	45,485**	**
May 2	3,169,000	63,253**	**
April 25	3,846,000	37,925	5,615
April 18	4,442,000	48,495	6,938
April 11	5,237,000	62,904	9,548
April 4	6,615,000	108,508	15,751
March 28	6,867,000	83,536	9,384
March 21	3,307,000	42,334	3,941
March 14	282,000	3,852	256

\* Initial state data

SA=seasonally adjusted NSA=not seasonally adjusted

Sources: U.S. and Maryland Departments of Labor

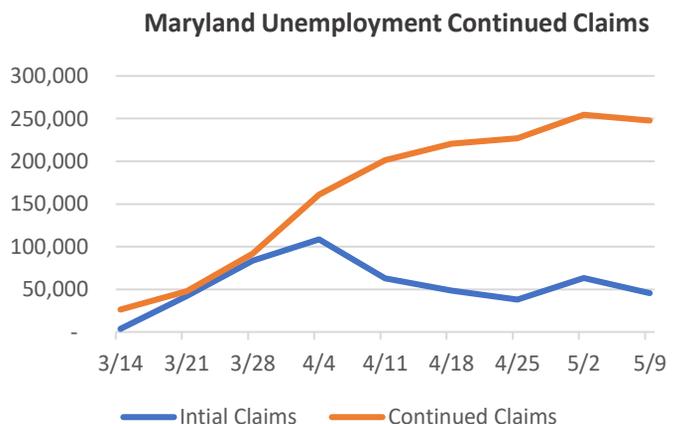
<https://www.dol.gov/ui/data.pdf>

<https://www.dllr.state.md.us/employment/uicounty.shtml>

## CONTINUED UNEMPLOYMENT CLAIMS IN MARYLAND

“Continued unemployment claims” measure the number of people collecting unemployment benefits on a weekly basis. These data are released one week later than initial claims data and are available at the state level. For May 9<sup>th</sup>, continued unemployment claims in Maryland totaled 247,803, a decrease of about 3% (about 6,700 claims) compared to the week of May 2<sup>nd</sup>. Data in the table for past weeks reflect revised numbers from the Labor Department.

Week of 2020	Continued Claims	Initial Claims
<b>May 9</b>	<b>247,803</b>	<b>48,485</b>
May 2	254,473	63,253
April 25	226,972	37,925
April 18	220,723	48,495
April 11	201,432	62,904
April 4	160,906	108,508
March 28	92,082	83,536
March 21	47,973	42,334
March 14	26,467	3,852



Source: U.S. Departments of Labor, <https://www.dol.gov/ui/data.pdf>

## A TIE BETWEEN REOPENING BUSINESSES AND UNEMPLOYMENT BENEFITS

All 50 states have begun some level of “reopening” their economies and allowing some non-essential businesses to resume activity, either statewide or on a local level. In Maryland, Governor Hogan has authorized jurisdictions to move into Stage One of reopening while giving them the authority to determine the timing of reopenings. Stage One replaces the “stay at home” order with a “safer at home” public health advisory, allows the reopening of some retail stores and personal service businesses, allows resumption of in-person worship services with safety measures, and still requires physical distancing and wearing of masks in indoor public areas.

In Maryland, four jurisdictions have chosen not to move into Stage One at this time. Baltimore City, Montgomery County and Prince George’s County are not reopening “until further notice.” Charles County is not moving into Stage One until May 29. In addition, four jurisdictions are partially moving to Stage One, with some restrictions – Anne Arundel, Baltimore, Frederick, and Howard Counties. All other counties moved into Stage One on May 15, 2020.

As businesses reopen and attempt to rehire employees, the question has arisen of whether a worker can refuse to return to work over concerns about the coronavirus and still collect unemployment benefits. Some workers have expressed generalized fears of returning to work and becoming infected– even if states say that businesses can reopen.

Most workers in the U.S. are employed “at-will,” meaning they can be fired for any non-illegal reason, including refusing to return to work. On May 19, Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin stated that workers who refuse an offer to come back to work after being laid off due to coronavirus will no longer be eligible for unemployment benefits.

Many articles written in past days indicate that some workers may have some legal protections under various federal laws, including the CARES Act, the Occupational Safety and Health Act, or the Americans with Disabilities Act, where they could refuse to return to work and still qualify for unemployment benefits. Most workers, however, may lose their unemployment eligibility for refusing to return to work.

Many states reportedly have allowed businesses to reopen despite not meeting recommended guidelines from the White House for a “downward trajectory” in documented cases or percentage of positive tests. Public health experts warn that reopening too soon risks a resurgence of the virus. If jurisdictions allows businesses to reopen despite not meeting recommended public health benchmarks, workers may be forced to choose between returning to work or losing their unemployment benefits.

Sources: <https://governor.maryland.gov/recovery/>, <https://www.cnbc.com/2020/05/20/mnuchin-may-be-wrong-about-small-business-loans-and-unemployment.html>, <https://www.npr.org/2020/04/24/843463707/sun-rays-disinfectants-and-false-hopes-misinformation-litters-the-road-to-reopen>, <https://time.com/5832140/going-back-to-work-coronavirus-rights/>, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/us-policy/2020/05/19/powell-mnuchin-senate-coronavirus-hearing-cares-act/>, <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2020/05/07/us/coronavirus-states-reopen-criteria.html>.