

# Food Stamps (Basic Food benefits): ABAWD Time Limit and Work Requirements

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❖ **Any ABAWD who has lost food assistance because they did not meet the work requirements should reapply to get food assistance through May.** As a COVID-19 preventive measure, no ABAWDs in any county will be penalized for not meeting work requirements through May 2020. This means all ABAWDs will keep receiving food assistance through May 2020 even if they are not meeting any work requirements. Read below for requirements for ABAWDs **after May 2020**.

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## Should I read this to find out the requirements that will be back in place after May 2020?

Yes, if all these are true:

- you get food stamps (Basic Food benefits)
- you are an Able-Bodied Adult without Dependents (ABAWD)
- you live in King County. The time limit and work requirement rules we discuss here currently only apply to King County. This will probably change in 2020 (exact month is unknown at this time) because of new federal rules. These rules will probably apply in more counties in Washington. We will update this as soon as new info is available. Check Washington LawHelp for updates.

## What is an Able-Bodied Adult without Dependents (ABAWD)?

All of these:

- Age 18-49.
- Not taking care of any minor children.
- Not pregnant.
- Can work.

[WAC 388-444-0030-0035](#)

## How does being an ABAWD affect my food benefits?

Usually, you will only get **3 full** months (and any partial months) of food stamps in a 36-month period if you do not meet work requirements.

A new 36-month clock started on January 1, 2018. You will get three full months of food stamps as of that date even if you do not meet the work requirements or are not exempt (excused from meeting those requirements).

If you were not exempt or meeting the work requirements, lost food stamps because of this before January 1, 2018, and have not reapplied since then, you should reapply as soon as possible.

If you are exempt or meeting work requirements, you will keep getting food stamps as you have been.

If you do not qualify for an exemption or meet work requirements, and you get, or have received, your three full months of food stamps after January 1, 2018, you **might not get food stamps again until 2021.**

[WAC 388-444-0030\(4\).](#)

## I get food stamps. Do I have to meet the ABAWD work requirements?

Yes, **if** all these are true:

- You live in King County. You do not live on the Muckleshoot Reservation. The time limit and work requirement rules will probably change and apply in more counties in 2020. Check Washington LawHelp for updates.
- You are age 18 to 49.
- You have no dependents.
- You are physically and mentally able to work.
- You do not qualify for an exemption under WAC 388-444-0035. (See exemptions on page two.)

[WAC 388-444-0030\(1\), \(3\).](#)

## Why do the work requirements only apply to some places in Washington?

Entire cities and counties can be exempt (excused) from the work requirements based on their unemployment rates. However, if the number of unemployed people is low enough, people in that city or county must meet the work requirements.

King County does not qualify for this exemption. King County residents must meet the work requirements.

[WAC 388-444-0030\(3\)](#); [7 CFR 273.24\(f\)](#).

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❖ The time limit and work requirement rules will probably apply in more counties starting April 1, 2020. Check Washington LawHelp for updates.

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## I am an ABAWD. I live in King County. Am I exempt from the work requirements?

Maybe. You do not have to meet the work requirements if **one** of these is true:

- You live on the Muckleshoot Reservation.
- You are not physically or mentally able to work.
- You live with a minor child.
- You care for someone with a disability or an incapacitated adult.
- You take part in a drug or alcohol rehabilitation program.
- You get a disability-based benefit (SSI, SSDI, ABD, Workers' Comp, and so on).
- You are pregnant.
- You get unemployment benefits.
- You have applied for unemployment benefits.
- You are a student enrolled at least halftime in a recognized school.
- You cannot find work, or otherwise cannot work, because you are homeless.
- You work 30 or more hours a week. (This number could be less. Contact DSHS if you think you meet this exemption.)
- You already meet the work requirements of an employment and training program for TANF.

[WAC 388-444-0035](#); [7 CFR 273.24\(c\)](#).

## How do I let DSHS know I think I should be exempt from work requirements?

Call DSHS immediately at 1-877-501-2233. Ask them to screen you for an exemption from the ABAWD work requirements.

If you think you should be exempt because you are unable to work, ask your doctor immediately for a written statement saying that.

If you are homeless, call DSHS immediately, or have someone do it for you. Tell DSHS you are homeless and why you cannot work because of this.

## What are the work requirements?

You must do **one** of these:

- **Work at least 20 hours a week, averaged monthly.** This includes work for pay, work for goods or services, in-kind work, and some other types of unpaid work. It can be a combination of these.
- **Volunteer with a Workfare organization.** DSHS calculates the number of required monthly hours by dividing your food benefits amount by the local minimum wage. Call DSHS to get the exact number of hours you must do.
- Take part in **Basic Food Employment and Training (BFET)**.
- Take part in **Resources to Initiate Successful Employment (RISE)**.
- Take part in a state-approved employment or training program. These include but are not limited to:
  - LEP Pathway
  - Refugee with Special Employment Needs (RSEN) project
  - Programs included in the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA)
  - AmeriCorps VISTA

[WAC 388-444-0030\(4\)](#), [-0040](#). Visit [www.dshs.wa.gov/esa-1](http://www.dshs.wa.gov/esa-1) for more info.

## **What is a Workfare organization?**

A non-profit, public, or government agency, such as a community organization or school. Call DSHS at 1-877-501-2233 to have them refer you to a Workfare organization.

[WAC 388-444-0040](http://www.dshs.wa.gov/esa/community-services-offices/workfare). Visit [www.dshs.wa.gov/esa/community-services-offices/workfare](http://www.dshs.wa.gov/esa/community-services-offices/workfare) for more info.

## **How many hours do I have to do at a Workfare organization?**

Ask DSHS. Call 1-877-501-2233 or visit your local CSO office. Find it at [www.dshs.wa.gov/esa/online-community-services-office-cso](http://www.dshs.wa.gov/esa/online-community-services-office-cso).

## **How do I show DSHS that I am doing my Workfare hours?**

Turn in the Basic Food Workfare Activity Report to DSHS. Get the report from DSHS or [www.dshs.wa.gov/sites/default/files/FSA/forms/pdf/01-205.pdf](http://www.dshs.wa.gov/sites/default/files/FSA/forms/pdf/01-205.pdf).

## **How do I sign up for BFET, RISE, or other state-approved employment or training program?**

Call DSHS at 1-877-501-2233. These programs have room for anyone who is eligible. You can also visit your local CSO office. Find it at [www.dshs.wa.gov/esa/online-community-services-office-cso](http://www.dshs.wa.gov/esa/online-community-services-office-cso).

Read more at [www.dshs.wa.gov/esa/community-services-offices/state-approved-programs](http://www.dshs.wa.gov/esa/community-services-offices/state-approved-programs).

## **I have not been able to go to my work or volunteer place. Do I have a good reason for not meeting the work requirements?**

You can claim “good cause” for not meeting the work or volunteer hours if you were sick, transportation broke down, or bad weather shut down the workplace. Other reasons might also be good cause.

If you missed work hours for reasons beyond your control, DSHS should accept this as “good cause” and not stop your food stamps.

If you have not met your work requirements for a good reason, call DSHS immediately at 1-877-501-2233.

See [WAC 388-444-0050](http://www.dshs.wa.gov/esa/community-services-offices/state-approved-programs).

## **I do not meet the work requirements. What will happen to my food stamps?**

They will end if you do not meet work requirements for **3 full** months. These months do not have to be in a row.

**Example 1:** You are not exempt. You have been meeting the work requirements. You do not meet the work requirements in all of January, February, and March 2020. Your food stamps will end March 31, 2020.

**Example 2:** You are not exempt. You have been meeting the work requirements. You do not meet the work requirements in all of January, March, and June. You meet the work requirements for all other months between March and June. Your food stamps will end June 30, 2020.

[WAC 388-444-0030\(4\)](#).

## **I did not meet the work requirements. I lost my food benefits. Can I get them back?**

Yes. One of these must be true: You

- Become exempt.
- Start doing work requirements.
- Move out of King County.

If you meet one of the first two, you can get a second period of three months of food stamps. If you move out of King County, the ABAWD time limit and work requirements no longer apply to you through March 2020. The time limit and work requirement rules will probably apply in more counties starting April 1, 2020. You can get food stamps back for as long as you are eligible. You should reapply as soon as possible when any of the above is true.

If you get your food stamps back for a second set of three months, and you stop meeting work requirements or lose your exemption from them, you will lose your food stamps again after the second three full months. You must then wait until January 1, 2021 and reapply.

[WAC 388-444-0045](#).

**I did not meet the work requirements. I lost my food stamps. I did not get a second three-month period OR I lost my food stamps again after the second three-month period. Can I ever get food stamps again?**

**Yes.** Anyone can get benefits for another three full months without meeting the work requirements starting January 1, 2021. It does not matter when you started getting food stamps before this date.

You should reapply close to the end of 2020 to get food stamps again starting January 1, 2021.

**DSHS denied my application for food stamps or ended my food stamps. I think they were wrong to do that.**

You can ask for an administrative hearing to challenge any DSHS decision you disagree with. This includes if DSHS denies or ends food stamps for alleged failure to meet an exemption or a work or volunteer requirement. Contact a local Legal Services Office immediately if DSHS incorrectly ends or denies your food stamps.

If you ask for a hearing, the three-month clock stops ticking. You get benefits until there is a hearing decision. If the hearing decision goes against you, you might have to pay back some of the food stamps you got while the hearing was pending.

Visit [www.dshs.wa.gov/esa/basic-food-work-requirements/abawds-able-bodied-adults-without-dependents](http://www.dshs.wa.gov/esa/basic-food-work-requirements/abawds-able-bodied-adults-without-dependents) for more info.

## Get Legal Help

**Outside King County:** Call the CLEAR Hotline at 1-888-201-1014 weekdays from 9:15 a.m. - 12:15 p.m.

**In King County:** Call 211 for referral to a legal services provider weekdays from 8:00 am – 6:00 pm.

**Persons 60 and Over** can call CLEAR\*Sr at 1-888-387-7111 (statewide).

**Deaf, hard of hearing or speech impaired callers** can call CLEAR or 211 (or toll-free 1-877-211-9274) using a relay service of their choice.

**Apply online with [CLEAR\\*Online](https://nwjustice.org/get-legal-help) - [nwjustice.org/get-legal-help](https://nwjustice.org/get-legal-help)**

CLEAR and 211 will provide a free interpreter.

Visit [WashingtonLawHelp.org](https://WashingtonLawHelp.org) for free info about Washington laws, do-it-yourself court forms, videos about legal issues and a legal help directory.

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