

U.S. Railroad Retirement Board www.rrb.gov

RAILROAD UNEMPLOYMENT and SICKNESS BENEFITS



U. S. Railroad Retirement Board
MISSION STATEMENT

The Railroad Retirement Board's mission is to administer retirement/survivor and unemployment/sickness insurance benefit programs for railroad workers and their families under the Railroad Retirement Act and the Railroad Unemployment Insurance Act. These programs provide income protection during old age and in the event of disability, death or temporary unemployment and sickness. The Railroad Retirement Board also administers aspects of the Medicare program and has administrative responsibilities under the Social Security Act and the Internal Revenue Code.

In carrying out its mission, the Railroad Retirement Board will pay benefits to the right people, in the right amounts, in a timely manner, and will take appropriate action to safeguard our customers' trust funds. The Railroad Retirement Board will treat every person who comes into contact with the agency with courtesy and concern, and respond to all inquiries promptly, accurately and clearly.

This pamphlet is issued for the purpose of general information. Certain limitations, exceptions, and special cases are not covered.

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Introduction

The Railroad Unemployment Insurance Act provides two kinds of benefits for railroad employees: unemployment benefits, when you are not working but are ready, willing and able to work; and sickness benefits, when you are unable to work because of illness or injury. Sickness benefits are also payable to female employees unable to work because of pregnancy, miscarriage, or childbirth.

Benefit payments are based on biweekly claims filed with the Railroad Retirement Board (RRB), the Federal agency responsible for administering the Railroad Unemployment Insurance Act.

The funds to pay unemployment and sickness benefits are provided by payroll taxes on railroad employers only. Employees do not pay unemployment insurance taxes.

The following describes the requirements for railroad unemployment and sickness benefits, the amounts payable, and how to claim them.

Base Year-Benefit Year

A new benefit year for unemployment and sickness benefits begins every July 1. To qualify in the benefit year beginning July 1, 2017, you must have base year earnings of \$3,637.50 in calendar year 2016, counting no more than \$1,455 per month. In the benefit year beginning July 1, 2018, these amounts will increase to \$3,862.50 and \$1,545, and they will then refer to annual and monthly earnings in calendar year 2017. If the base year was your first year of railroad service, you must also have worked in 5 months of that year.

If you do not meet these requirements but have at least 10 years of service, you might still be able to qualify under the conditions described on page 4 for extended and accelerated benefits.

Biweekly Benefits

The maximum daily benefit rate payable in the benefit year beginning July 2017 is \$72 and, for biweekly claims, maximum benefits can total \$720. The daily benefit rate rises to \$77 in July 2018, and may increase in future benefit years depending on the growth in average national wages.

Registration and waiting period.-- Benefits are normally paid for the number of days of unemployment or sickness over 4 in 14-day registration periods. Initial sickness claims must also begin with 4 consecutive days of sickness. However, during the first 14-day claim period in a benefit year, benefits are only payable for each day of unemployment or sickness in excess of 7 which, in effect, provides a 1-week waiting period. Separate waiting periods are required for unemployment and sickness benefits. However, only one 7-day waiting period is required during any period of continuing unemployment or sickness, even if that period continues into a subsequent benefit year.

Strike benefits.-- If you are unemployed because of a strike conducted in accordance with the Railway Labor Act, benefits are not payable for days of unemployment during the first 14 days of the strike, but benefits are payable during subsequent 14-day periods. If a strike is in violation of the Railway Labor Act, unemployment benefits are not payable to employees participating in the strike. However, employees not among those participating in such an illegal strike, but who are unemployed on account of the strike, may receive benefits after the first 2 weeks of the strike.

While a benefit year waiting period cannot count toward a strike waiting period, the 14-day strike waiting period may count as the benefit year waiting period if you subse-

Note.--Sickness benefits payable for the first 6 months after the month the employee last worked are subject to tier I railroad retirement payroll taxes, unless benefits are being paid for an on-the-job injury.

quently become unemployed for reasons other than a strike later in the benefit year.

Duration of Benefits

Normal benefits.-- Normal benefits are paid for up to 130 days (26 weeks) in a benefit year. Benefit rights are exhausted when a benefit year ends (normally June 30) or earlier if benefit payments equal base year creditable earnings. Maximum normal benefits payable in the benefit year beginning July 2017 cannot exceed your railroad earnings in base year 2016, counting monthly earnings of up to \$1,879. In the benefit year beginning July 2018, monthly earnings up to \$1,996 in base year 2017 will be counted.

In order to qualify for normal unemployment benefits, the employee must not have voluntarily quit work without good cause and not have voluntarily retired.

Extended benefits.-- If you have 10 or more years of service (120 cumulative service months or more) and exhaust your normal unemployment or sickness benefits, you may be eligible to receive extended benefits for up to 65 days (during 7 consecutive 14-day registration periods). Also, if you are not qualified for normal benefits in the current benefit year, but received normal benefits in the previous year, you may still be eligible for extended benefits.

In order to qualify for extended unemployment benefits, you must not have voluntarily quit work without good cause and not have voluntarily retired. To qualify for extended sickness benefits, you must not have voluntarily retired and must be under age 65.

Accelerated benefits.-- If you have 10 or more years of service (120 cumulative service months or more) and your earnings do not qualify you for unemployment or sickness benefits in the current benefit year, but will qualify you in the next benefit year, you may be able to receive nor-

mal unemployment or sickness benefits before the regular beginning date of the next benefit year. To be eligible, you must have 14 or more consecutive days of either unemployment or sickness; not have voluntarily retired or, if claiming unemployment benefits, quit work without good cause; and be under age 65 when claiming sickness benefits.

General Requirements

To be eligible for unemployment benefits, you must be ready, willing and able to work and be available for work. A “day of unemployment” is a day on which you meet these conditions and do not receive any pay, are not disqualified, and have properly registered for unemployment benefits. If you are in train and engine service, any calendar day on which you do not work solely because of a mileage limitation or work-restriction agreement or solely because you are between regularly assigned trips or tours of duty, or because you missed a turn in pool service, is *not* considered a day of unemployment.

If you are an extra-board employee, you can receive unemployment benefits between jobs if the miles and/or hours you actually worked were less than the equivalent of normal full-time work in your class of service during the 14-day claim period. Entitlement to benefits would also depend on your earnings.

To be eligible for sickness benefits, you must be unable to work because of illness or injury. A “day of sickness” is a day on which you meet this condition and for which you do not receive any pay and have filed an application for sickness benefits and a statement of sickness signed by your doctor or other authorized individual. This statement provides evidence of your medical condition and its expected duration.

You may not receive benefits for any day for which you

receive pay. This includes railroad and nonrailroad wages, salary, pay for time lost, pay while sick, dismissal allowances, most wage guaranty payments, vacation pay, holiday pay, military reservist pay, earnings from self-employment, or remuneration other than subsidiary remuneration.

However, payments received under a nongovernmental supplemental unemployment or sickness insurance plan approved by the RRB, your own health or accident insurance policy or a group insurance policy will not affect entitlement to unemployment or sickness benefits and should not be reported on your claims.

Also, an earnings test is applied to unemployment claims. If a claimant's earnings for days worked, and/or days of vacation or paid leave, in a 14-day registration period are more than a certain indexed amount, no benefits are payable for *any* days of unemployment in that period. Earnings include pay from self-employment and railroad, nonrailroad, and part-time work. Earnings also include pay that you would have earned except for your failure to mark up or report for duty on time, or because you missed a turn in pool service or were otherwise not ready or willing to work.

For the benefit year beginning July 2017, the earnings test is \$1,455; and for the benefit year that begins July 2018 the test will be \$1,545. These amounts correspond to the base year monthly compensation amounts used in determining eligibility for benefits in each year. But, even if an earnings test applies on the first claim in a benefit year, this will not prevent the first claim from satisfying the waiting period in that benefit year.

On the other hand, earnings of not more than \$15 a day from work which is substantially less than full-time and not inconsistent with the holding of normal full-time employment may be considered subsidiary remuneration and may

not prevent payment of any days in a claim. However, be sure to report all full and part-time work on your claims, regardless of the amount of your earnings, so the RRB can determine whether it affects your benefits.

How to Claim Benefits

Unemployment.-- In order to receive unemployment benefits, you must file an application for benefits by mail or through the RRB's website (www.rrb.gov). If you choose to file by mail, you must obtain an application from your employer, labor organization, local RRB office, or online. The completed application should be mailed to the local RRB office as soon as possible and, in any case, must be filed within 30 days of the date on which you became unemployed or the first day for which you wish to claim benefits. Benefits may be lost if the application is filed late.

To file your application electronically, you must first establish an RRB Internet Services account. Once you do this, you will be able to file your application for unemployment benefits, as well as conduct other business with the RRB, online. Instructions for establishing an online account can be found in the Benefit Online Services section on the www.rrb.gov home page. For security purposes, first-time users must apply for a Password Request Code (PRC). The agency automatically mails a PRC to any employee who files a paper application for unemployment or sickness benefits. If an individual has not received a PRC, they can request one by clicking the appropriate box on the home page. They will then receive the PRC by mail at their home address in about 10 days.

You are encouraged to establish an online account while still employed so the account is ready if you ever need to apply for these benefits or use other Internet services.

Once you establish an online account, you do not need to do so again.

Whether you file by mail or online, the local RRB office reviews the completed unemployment application and notifies your current employer, and your base-year railroad employer if different. Your employer has the right to provide information about your benefit application.

Biweekly claim forms are then mailed to you, and are also made available on the RRB's website, as long as you remain unemployed and eligible for benefits.

Claim forms should be signed and mailed only on or after the last day of the claim. You also have the option of filing these claims online. The completed claim must be received by an RRB office within 15 days of the end of the claim or the date the claim was mailed to you or made available online, whichever is later. You should not file both a paper claim and an online claim for the same period.

The RRB must notify your base-year employer each time you file a claim for unemployment benefits and give that employer an opportunity to submit information relevant to the claim before the RRB makes an initial determination on it. Any current employer is also notified. The RRB also notifies your base-year employer each time benefits are paid to you.

Only one application need be filed during a benefit year even if you become unemployed more than once. However, in that case, you must request a new claim form from an RRB office within 30 days of the first day for which you want to claim benefits. These claims may then be filed by mail or online.

Sickness.-- An application for sickness benefits can be obtained from railroad employers, railroad labor organizations, any RRB office or printed off the agency's website. An application and a doctor's statement of sickness are re-

quired at the beginning of each “period of continuing sickness” for which benefits are claimed. The RRB suggests that you keep an application form on hand for use in claiming sickness benefits, and that your family knows where the form is kept and how to use it.

Attached to each application is a statement of sickness which must be completed by your doctor. If you become unable to work because of sickness or injury, complete your application and take or send it to your doctor for completion of the statement of sickness.

If you are too sick to complete the application, someone else may do it for you. In such cases, a member of your family should also complete Form SI-10, *Statement of Authority to Act for Employee*, which accompanies the statement of sickness.

Upon completion, the forms should be mailed to the RRB’s headquarters in Chicago by the 7th day of illness or injury for which benefits are claimed, at which point the RRB reviews your application and statement of sickness to determine eligibility. Biweekly claim forms are then mailed to you and also made available on the RRB’s website as long as you remain unable to work due to an illness or injury and are eligible for benefits.

The claim forms must be received at the RRB within 30 days of the last day of the claim period, or within 30 days of the date the claim form was mailed to you or made available online, whichever is later. Benefits may be lost if an application or claim is filed late. If an unemployment or sickness application or claim is filed late, you should include a signed statement explaining the reason for the late filing.

As with claims for unemployment benefits, the RRB must notify your base-year employer each time a claim for sickness benefits is filed. That employer has the right to

submit information relevant to the claim before the RRB makes its initial determination. If your current employer is not your base-year employer, your current employer is also notified. In addition, the base-year employer is notified each time benefits are paid to you.

Payments.-- Under the agency's Customer Service Plan, if a claimant files an application or claim for unemployment or sickness benefits, a decision will be made within 10 days of the date the RRB receives the form. If the claimant is entitled to benefits, benefits will generally be paid within one week of that decision.

Some claims for benefits may take longer to handle than others if they are more complex, or if an RRB office has to get information from other people or organizations. If you do not receive a decision notice or payment within the specified time period, you can call the RRB toll-free at 1-877-772-5772 to obtain your current status.

The normal method of payment for railroad unemployment and sickness benefits is by Direct Deposit. With Direct Deposit, payments are issued directly to a claimant's bank, savings and loan, credit union, or other financial institution. Applicants for unemployment and sickness benefits are asked to provide information needed for Direct Deposit enrollment.

Free Placement Service

The Railroad Unemployment Insurance Act authorizes the RRB to operate a free placement service. The primary purpose of the placement service is to secure new employment for experienced railroad workers who have lost their jobs.

When you apply for unemployment benefits you also apply for employment service. You will probably be interviewed by an RRB representative who will try to help you

secure employment if you do not have good prospects of returning to your former job. You may be referred by the representative to a suitable railroad job; otherwise, an effort will be made to place you in a nonrailroad job for which you appear qualified. As part of its placement service, the RRB maintains a list of job openings reported by railroads. The list is available for review at all offices of the RRB and online at www.rrb.gov. The booklet *Guide to Finding the Right Job* (Form UB-12) is also available from any RRB field office and online.

Disqualifications

If you have been paid a separation allowance by your employer, you cannot receive unemployment or sickness benefits for the period of time it would have taken to earn the amount of the allowance.

If you leave either your railroad or nonrailroad job voluntarily without good cause, you will be disqualified for railroad unemployment benefits until you have returned to railroad work and earned wages sufficient to qualify for benefits again.

If you leave work voluntarily with good cause, you will be disqualified for unemployment benefits for periods in which you could receive unemployment benefits under another law. If you are not qualified for other unemployment benefits, you may receive railroad unemployment benefits.

If you refuse to accept suitable work, or fail to follow instructions to apply for work or to report to a State unemployment office or an RRB office for an interview, you may be disqualified for unemployment benefits for 30 days.

You will be disqualified for unemployment benefits for any day on which you take part in a strike which began in violation of the Railway Labor Act or in violation of the

established rules and practices of your labor organization.

You may be disqualified for sickness benefits if you fail to take a medical examination when required by the RRB.

You will be disqualified for both unemployment and sickness benefits for 75 days if you make a false or fraudulent statement or claim to obtain benefits. You may also be subject to a fine or imprisonment. The RRB conducts checks with Federal agencies, all 50 States (as well as the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico), and railroads to detect fraudulent benefit claims. The RRB also checks with physicians to verify the accuracy of medical statements supporting sickness benefit claims.

Receipt of Other Benefits

If you receive a regular retirement or survivor benefit under the Railroad Retirement Act, Social Security Act, or any other social insurance law for days for which you are also entitled to benefits under the Railroad Unemployment Insurance Act, your unemployment or sickness benefits are payable only to the extent they exceed the other payments for those days. Examples of other such social insurance payments are military pensions, firefighter and police pensions, or certain workers' compensation payments. *Claimants should report all such other payments promptly to avoid having to refund benefits later.*

There is no reduction in unemployment or sickness benefits for benefits paid under an RRB-approved nongovernmental sickness insurance plan, such as a supplemental sickness benefit plan established by a railroad. Similarly, there is no reduction in benefits if you receive supplemental unemployment benefits under an RRB-approved nongovernmental unemployment benefit plan. But unemployment and sickness benefits provided under the Railroad Unemployment Insurance Act are not payable to you if you also

receive Federal/State unemployment or sickness benefits under other laws, including Canadian law, for the same period of time.

Damages

If you receive sickness benefits for an injury or illness for which you are paid damages, the RRB is entitled to reimbursement of either the amount of the benefits paid for the injury or illness, or the net amount of the settlement (after deducting your gross medical, hospital, and legal expenses), whichever is less.

Protective Allowances

Unemployment benefits can sometimes be paid even though you are covered by a job protection plan which guarantees you a certain amount of work or wages each month. However, if you receive a protective allowance from your employer for a period for which benefits were paid, some or all of the benefits will have to be refunded. You should report such allowances promptly to the RRB.

Appeals

Employers.-- Employers may protest the payment of a claimant's benefits, but such protests do not prevent the timely payment of benefits. However, employees may be required to repay benefits if the employer's protest is ultimately successful. The employer also has the right to appeal an unfavorable decision to the RRB's Bureau of Hearings and Appeals.

Employees.-- If you disagree with a decision made on your claim, you have 60 days from the date of the initial notice of the decision in which to file a written statement requesting reconsideration from the RRB office that made the decision. This step is mandatory before a decision may

be appealed to the Bureau of Hearings and Appeals. Failure to request reconsideration within 60 days will result in forfeiture of further appeal rights.

If the case involves a benefit overpayment of more than 10 times the maximum daily benefit rate, you may request a waiver of repayment. A request for waiver filed within 60 days will, in certain cases, defer recovery of the overpayment from subsequent benefit payments. If you request waiver, you may be asked to complete a financial statement on a form provided by the RRB. If dissatisfied with the reconsideration or waiver decision of an RRB office, you may, within 60 days, appeal to the Bureau of Hearings and Appeals.

If not satisfied with the Bureau of Hearings and Appeals' decision, you may further appeal, within 60 days, to the three-member Board which heads the agency.

If not satisfied with the three-member Board's decision, you may file a petition for a review of your claim by a U.S. Court of Appeals. A petition for review must be filed within 90 days of the notice of the Board's decision.

Income Taxes

Unemployment benefits paid by the RRB are subject to Federal income tax, just like unemployment benefits paid under State government programs.

Sickness benefits paid by the RRB, except for sickness benefits resulting from on-the-job injuries, are subject to Federal income tax under the same limitations and conditions that apply to the taxation of sick pay received by workers in other industries.

The Railroad Unemployment Insurance Act specifically provides that railroad unemployment and sickness benefits are not subject to State income taxes. In January of each year, the RRB sends railroad employees Form 1099-G

showing the total amount of unemployment benefits paid during the previous year and/or a Form W-2 showing the net amount of sickness benefits paid.

For More Information

Unemployment and sickness claimants can conveniently check on the status of their claims or payments at any time by calling the agency toll-free at 1-877-772-5772. The service is available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Press “1” to access the automated *HelpLine* services, and press “1” again for information on unemployment and sickness benefits. To use this service, you will need the Personal Identification Number (PIN) printed on the back of the claim form. (This PIN is different than the one created to access online services via the agency’s website.)

The RRB’s website at www.rrb.gov is another source of information on railroad unemployment and sickness benefits. Employees can file their applications and claims for unemployment benefits, and claims for sickness benefits, online. Claimants can also access information about their individual railroad unemployment insurance account statements. These statements display the type and amount of a claimant’s last five benefit payments, the claim period for which the payments were made, and the dates that the payments were approved. Claimants can confirm the RRB’s receipt of their latest application or claim for unemployment or sickness benefits, along with the receipt of any supplemental doctor’s statement required to continue the payment of sickness benefits. In addition, the service allows claimants to view the address currently on record for them and, if applicable, their Direct Deposit information.

This feature is accessible through the Benefit Online Services section on the home page. To use this service, claimants must get a PIN/Password and establish an RRB Internet Services account, as described earlier.

NONDISCRIMINATION ON THE BASIS OF DISABILITY

Under Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and RRB regulations, no qualified person may be discriminated against on the basis of disability. The RRB's programs and activities must be accessible to all qualified applicants and beneficiaries, including those with impaired vision and/or hearing. Individuals with disabilities needing assistance (including auxiliary aids or program information in accessible formats) should contact the nearest RRB office. Complaints of alleged discrimination by the RRB on the basis of disability must be filed within 90 days in writing with the Director of Administration, U.S. Railroad Retirement Board, 844 North Rush Street, Chicago, Illinois 60611-1275. Questions about individual rights under this regulation may be directed to the RRB's Director of Equal Opportunity at the above address.

COMMENTS? If you have any comments or suggestions regarding the presentation of information in this publication, please let us know. You can fax us at 1-312-751-7154, e-mail us at opa@rrb.gov, or write us at the following address: Public Affairs, U.S. Railroad Retirement Board, 844 North Rush Street, Chicago, IL 60611-1275.

**FRAUD, WASTE, AND ABUSE
HOTLINE 1-800-772-4258**

The RRB's Office of Inspector General established its Hotline as a public service. The Hotline provides individuals with a means to report or discuss any suspected misconduct relating to the RRB, its programs, or employees.

If you believe a doctor, hospital, or other health care provider is billing Medicare for services not provided or for unnecessary medical procedures or supplies; someone is illegally receiving RRB benefits; or you wish to report or discuss any other suspected misconduct relating to the RRB, its programs, or employees, please contact the Office of Inspector General at:

Toll-Free Hotline: 1-800-772-4258

U.S. Mail:

RRB-OIG Hotline Officer
844 North Rush Street, 4th Floor
Chicago, IL 60611-1275

Fax: 1-312-751-4342

E-mail: hotline@oig.rrb.gov

Please review the RRB's e-mail notice and Internet privacy policy at www.rrb.gov before submitting information online.

Note: Please do not contact the Office of Inspector General's Hotline with questions regarding benefit eligibility requirements, delayed payments, or similar issues. These types of matters should be directed to an RRB office.

**U.S. RAILROAD RETIREMENT BOARD
844 North Rush Street
Chicago, Illinois 60611-1275
www.rtb.gov**

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