Dear Employee,

[Insert personal greeting]

In order to set you up for success when applying for unemployment benefits, we have worked with the Employment Security Department (ESD) to provide this important information. The more prepared you are before applying, the more likely you are to get your benefits more quickly.

**Before you apply**Visit ESD’s [Unemployment page](https://esd.wa.gov/unemployment), where you will find an [eligibility checker](https://esdorchardstorage.blob.core.windows.net/esdwa/Default/ESDWAGOV/Unemployment/UIEligibilityChecker.pdf) and an [application checklist](https://esdorchardstorage.blob.core.windows.net/esdwa/Default/ESDWAGOV/Unemployment/COVID-19_Applications_CheckList.pdf) that will help you prepare to apply. Please note that, even if you have not worked 680 hours this past year (one of Washington state’s eligibility requirements for unemployment insurance), you may be eligible for the new expanded unemployment assistance made available by the federal CARES Act.

After you’ve gone through the checklist, please apply online at [esd.wa.gov](http://esd.wa.gov).

Everyone needs to take three steps to apply for unemployment insurance benefits:

1. Create a SecureAccess Washington (SAW) account. You can do this online anytime, and [you’re we encouraged to watch this tutorial video to help you set it up smoothly](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JgrLhqbtHQ4&feature=emb_logo).
2. Submit an application for unemployment benefits.  You can do this online, after you have created your SAW account and are no longer working.
3. Submit your weekly claim for every week that you want to receive unemployment benefits.  You can do this online, every Sunday after you submit your application.

You should know:

* When you apply for unemployment, you will need to say why you are not working for your employer. In this case, you should choose “laid off,” since we anticipate returning to normal business sometime in the near future.
* We recommend that you do not request standby when you apply. Our operations have been disrupted by COVID-19, and we expect to return to work soon after the Washington state “Stay Home, Stay Healthy” order has ended.
* ESD usually requires that you look for work while you receive benefits. That requirement is optional now during this crisis. Note that you will still be asked about your work search by ESD, but it is okay to say you haven’t looked for work. Answer truthfully.
* Benefits are paid after your application has been approved and after you submit each weekly claim. Once approved, people are receiving their funds within 7—10 days. If you sign up for direct deposit it can be within 24-48 hours. You can backdate your claim start date to when you were laid off. Because ESD will pay retroactive to your eligibility date, your first check may be larger than later weekly checks.
* The Governor has put in place emergency measures to help you through this crisis. They are managed by other agencies and can be found at coronavirus.wa.gov and include items such as:
	+ A temporary moratorium on evictions for renters.
	+ Help with utilities.
	+ Cash assistance for families with and without children.
	+ Free school lunches.
* While ESD is getting these new laws and rules implemented, please sign up for [COVID-19 action alerts](https://esd.wa.gov/newsroom/covid-19) to be among the first to know when new information is released.
* With the unprecedented and historic circumstances related to the COVID-19 crisis, ESD is receiving an enormous increase in calls and emails. They are ramping up hiring to help respond to those questions, but you should do your best to find an answer to questions on their website: [esd.wa.gov](https://esd.wa.gov/). If you need to call, expect long wait times.

[Insert personal closing]