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Property owners in West Salem face some of the largest property tax bills in the Willamette Valley. STATESMAN JOURNAL FILE

# Unemployed could be in for a tax surprise

**Bill Poehler**  
 Salem Statesman Journal  
 USA TODAY NETWORK

Thousands of first-time unemployment filers in Oregon could be in for a surprise when they file their 2020 tax returns.

Over 600,000 people in Oregon filed for unemployment since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic in March 2020. When they did, whether they remember or not, they were prompted to choose whether they wanted money from their unemployment withheld.

It's unclear how many did not. Unemployment benefits are considered taxable income by the Internal Revenue Service and the state. If people didn't choose to have taxes withheld,

they face a significant tax liability when filing their 2020 taxes.

Oregon Employment Department acting director David Gerstenfeld said the department will begin sending out the 1099-G forms, which show how much money people received in unemployment benefits and how much tax was withheld, next week.

He said all of those forms should be mailed by Jan. 31.

"For anybody who wants a digital copy, the 1099G form will be available in the online claims system so people don't have to call or write to us, they can just access that directly in the online claims system," Gerstenfeld said.

Those in Oregon who claimed unemployment were given a choice of holding 10% of their benefits for federal income

taxes and 6% for state income taxes. But that was voluntary.

"A lot of people do have those amounts withheld and we've already forwarded those on to the Internal Revenue Service or the Oregon Department of Revenue," Gerstenfeld said.

Those who didn't choose to have the tax withheld could be facing a large payment, especially with the boosted unemployment amounts – \$600 weekly from March to July and \$300 weekly until September.

All of that additional money is taxable, too

The stimulus payments of \$1,200 and \$600 that were sent out in April 2020 and January 2021 are not taxable. But

people who did not receive one of the payments are eligible to claim them on their taxes as deductions, according to a statement from the IRS.

Some people who had their 2019 tax refunds directly deposited had their stimulus payments deposited a different bank account than the one on their 2019 taxes.

If there is a third stimulus payment that comes in 2021, some people will need to update their routing of it, either by direct deposit or physical address, in order to receive the payment.

*Bill Poehler covers Marion County for the Statesman Journal. Contact him at bpoehler@statesmanjournal.com or Twitter.com/bpoehler*



A long line of cars forms at the Marion County and Salem Health COVID-19 vaccination clinic along Silverton Road Northeast on Thursday at the Oregon State Fairgrounds in Salem. ABIGAIL DOLLINS / STATESMAN JOURNAL

# Vaccine

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tions were added with just minutes to spare. Some, such as agricultural workers and food processing employees, were removed.

In Oregon, some large COVID-19 outbreaks have been in agriculture, and food processing, and in communities that are home to those industries.

The committee began meeting on Jan. 5. It had one official and two optional meetings before Thursday.

The recommendation now goes to the Oregon Health Authority.

**What does Oregon's COVID-19 vaccine distribution look like?**

In Oregon, vaccines currently are generally available to:

- Health care workers at hospitals, urgent care clinics, outpatient settings, public health and early learning settings.
- People who work in hospice programs, mobile crisis care and related services, secure transport and non-emergency medical transport.
- Employees and residents of skilled nursing, long-term care and memory care facilities.
- Emergency medical service providers and other first responders.
- Tribal health programs.



Oregon health care workers and residents of long-term care facilities are currently getting the COVID-19 vaccinations, and Thursday, a state group suggested who would come after that. BRIAN HAYES/STATESMAN JOURNAL

- In-home care and day treatment services.
- People working in correctional settings.
- Death care workers.

On Jan. 23, Oregon will begin allowing vaccines for K-12 educators and staff and childcare providers, and for anyone age 65 and older.

Gov. Kate Brown is scheduled to provide more details on Oregon's distribu-

tion plans for those groups at a Friday news conference.

The committee's recommendation is for who follows next.

**Can I register somewhere to be notified when it's my turn?**

Unlike some states, including neighboring Washington, Oregon does not have plans to set up an app or website

where people can register to be told when it's their turn.

Healthcare and long-term care facility workers should check with their employers. Long-term care facility residents will be vaccinated at their facilities.

Marion County and Salem Health are sponsoring vaccination clinics for people who qualify and aren't vaccinated by their employers at the Oregon State Fairgrounds, 2330 17th St. NE in Salem.

**Are vaccinations free?**

Yes. The federal government has purchased the vaccines, and residents won't be charged for them. However, some places may charge a fee to administer the shot. Insurance should cover the fee.

**Can I stop wearing a mask and social distancing once I am fully vaccinated?**

No. Health officials say it's possible even a fully vaccinated person could still become infected and experience mild illness or pass the virus on to someone else.

*Tracy Loew is a reporter at the Statesman Journal. She can be reached at tloew@statesmanjournal.com, 503-399-6779 or on Twitter at @Tracy\_Loew.*