



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Contact: Anthony Triana

405.818.0791

atriana@saxum.com

Weekly Jobless Claims Remain at Record Level

OESC Pushes Through Thousands of Stalled Claims

OKLAHOMA CITY – The number of initial claims for unemployment benefits filed with the Oklahoma Employment Security Commission (OESC) for the week ending May 30, 2020, shows the impact of business closures and job loss due to COVID-19, as well as the oil industry crisis, which all continues to grip the Sooner State's economy and families.

For the week ending May 30, 2020, unadjusted initial claims in Oklahoma totaled 37,986, a decrease of 5,728 from the previous adjusted week of 43,714, revised up 11,587 from the initially reported total of 32,127.

Nationally, the seasonally adjusted initial claims totaled 1,877,000, a decrease of 249,000 from the previous week's revised level of 2,126,000. The advance seasonally adjusted insured unemployment rate for the country was 14.8% for the week ending May 23, up 0.5%.

"We're changing the way we've always done things as the cumulative number of Oklahomans filing unemployment claims tops 500,000," said OESC Interim Director Shelley Zumwalt. "Desperate times call for innovative solutions and we've assembled some exceptional people to revise our procedures to get people the benefits they so urgently need."

Among the changes Zumwalt implemented during her first week as interim director was to push through more than 27 thousand claims that had been held up for a variety of reasons in the complex unemployment approval process.

"Thousands of Oklahomans who had been waiting weeks for resolution of their claims are now in paid status," Zumwalt said. "The challenge under this system continues to be that a solution to one problem tends to create another obstacle that has to be overcome."

Many claimants did not receive funds until Tuesday or Wednesday as the increased number of claims moved to pay status last week caused delays in processing debit card and direct deposit transactions.

"We are focused on the process and eliminating the red tape," Zumwalt said. "We've now moved many of our Level 2 claims agents down to Level 1 in order to meet and help people on the front end."

The agency is also putting Level 1 claims agents through additional training to better assist claimants in clearing issues and reducing the need to escalate claims to the next level. Claimants may experience longer Call Center wait times while questions are answered, and issues resolved.

The complexity of an unemployment claim has always required a period of review. The more complex the claim, the longer it takes to process. Zumwalt is leading the effort to break that log jam by implementing automation to systematically resolve issues and erase inherent delays built into the decade's old unemployment claims structure.

"We have to be results-oriented and solution-driven," Zumwalt said. "We're quickly approaching three months since these crises began. Yes, Oklahoma is reopening and striving to get back to normal. In the meantime, we still have tens of thousands of people with no job to return to and lots of responsibilities to meet and OESC will provide that relief."

Individuals seeking unemployment benefits under the CARES Act should go to <https://ui.ok.gov> and create an account with the Get Started button to connect their social security number and pull all unemployment information into one location.

Unemployment claimants should be aware that not returning to work when recalled or when work is available could potentially be disqualified from receiving unemployment benefits.

Employers may report this activity by emailing returntowork@oesc.state.ok.us, calling 405-962-7524, or mailing OESC at P.O. Box 52006, Oklahoma City, OK, 73152-2006.

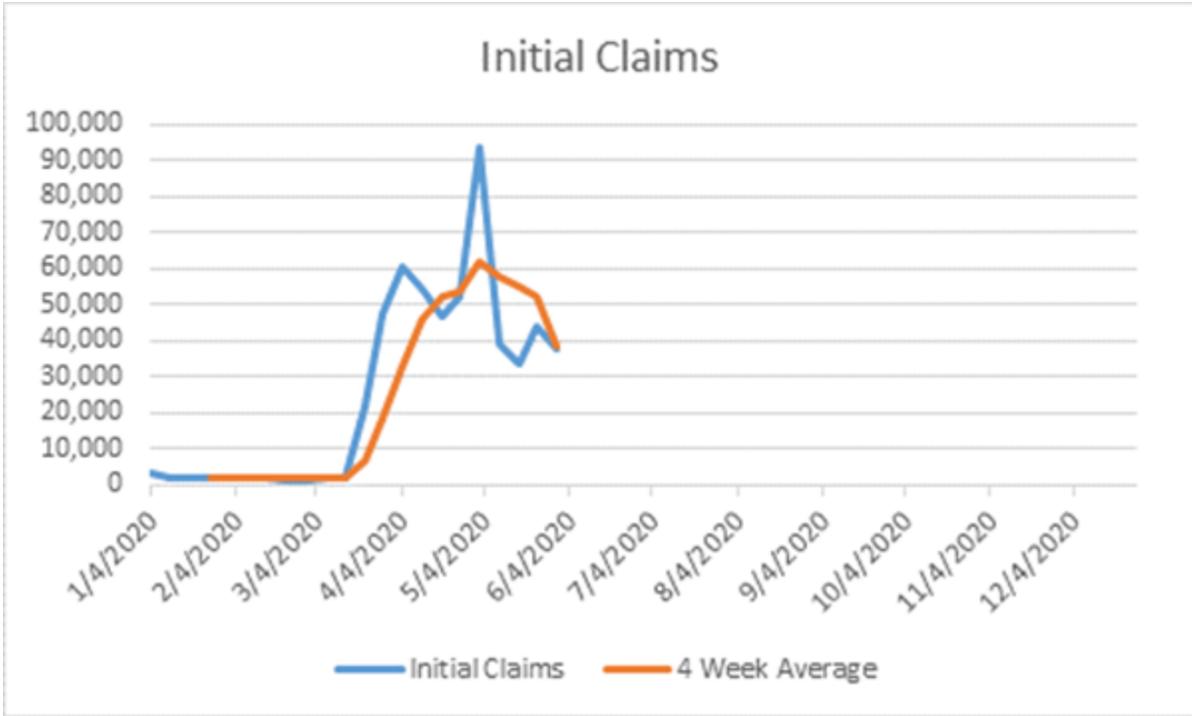
If a claimant returns to work fulltime, they should keep their unemployment claim open with OESC and not certify a weekly claim. If they return part-time, a claimant may continue to certify their weekly claim and must report all gross earnings for the week to potentially receive a partial benefit. Eligibility for continued benefits is determined on the circumstances of each individual claimant.

OESC is an excellent resource for people looking to re-enter the job market by connecting Oklahomans with available employment through <https://okjobmatch.com>.

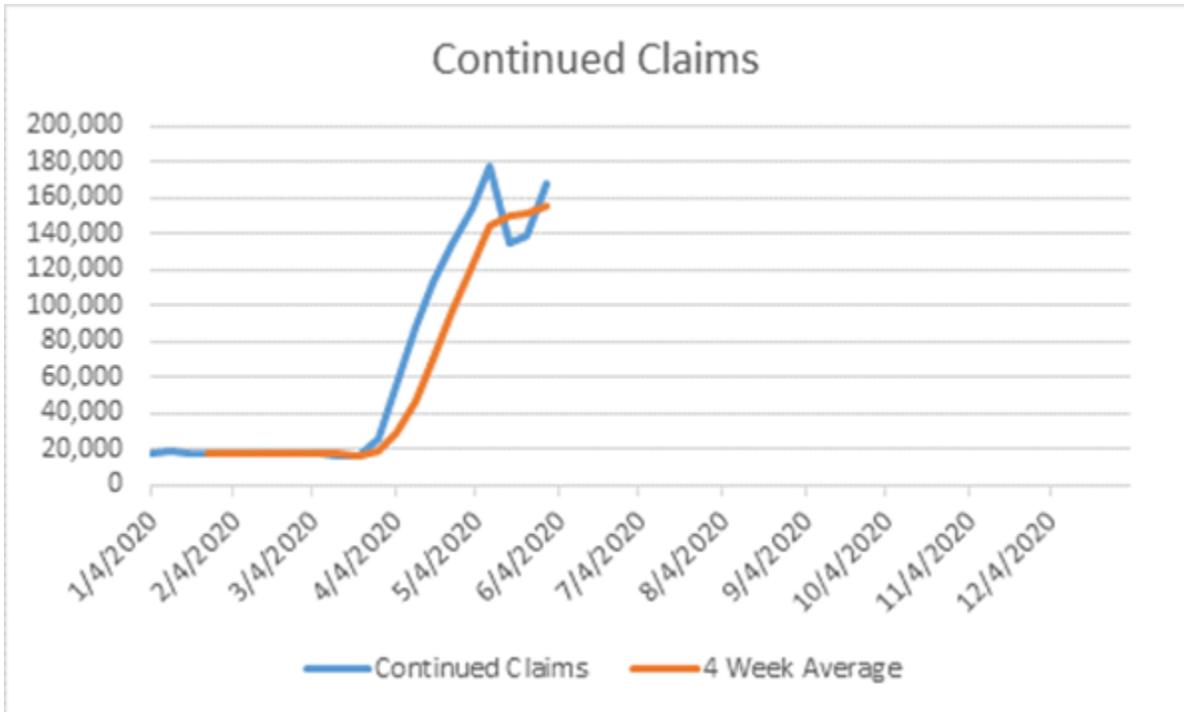
If a Pandemic Unemployment Assistance (PUA) eligible claimant reopens their business or returns to the gig economy or independent contracts, they will still receive backdated unemployment benefits to the date their COVID-19 related job loss or business closure occurred.

The national weekly seasonally adjusted initial claims report is one of ten components in the Composite Index of Leading Economic Indicators. To smooth out the volatility in the weekly initial claims data, a 4-week moving average is used to assess trends.

In Oklahoma, the less volatile initial claims four-week moving average declined 13,975 to 38,555 for the week ending 5/30/2020.



The advance unadjusted number for continued claims totaled 167,999, an increase of 28,803 from the previous week. The continued four-week moving average increased 3,332 to 155,137.



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