



U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs
Veterans Benefits Administration

Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19) Financial Relief Actions and Time Limit Extensions

Background

On March 13, 2020, the President declared the COVID-19 pandemic as a national emergency, effective March 1, 2020. While United States Postal Service operations and other mail delivery services continue uninterrupted, in some cases, local travel restrictions and COVID-19-mandated health and safety precautions may impact Veterans' and claimants' abilities to timely file forms, documents, or other responses in connection with VA claims and appeals. VA is also sensitive to claimants who wish to have their claims and appeals processed as quickly as possible, and a system-wide extension would negatively affect those who need timely benefits and healthcare. Therefore, VA is providing options for Veterans and claimants to specifically request extensions on filing dates and requested evidence dates, as well as rescheduling of examinations and hearings. VA is also taking steps to provide Veterans and claimants with financial relief.

Financial Relief Actions

VA is suspending all collection actions on Veteran debts under the jurisdiction of the Treasury Department. VA will stop all referrals of delinquent debt to credit reporting agencies and will not take any actions to stop Veterans who are in delinquent status from seeking VA Home Loans. However, collection actions will resume after the termination of the national emergency declaration.

VA is also automatically suspending collection action on all new benefit debts and is offering temporary suspension or extended repayment plans for existing benefit debts, whichever the Veteran prefers. To request a suspension or extended repayment plan, or to request a refund on a debt collection that was suspended, contact the Debt Management Center at 1-800-827-0648.

Claims Filing

Claimants and beneficiaries can continue to submit complete claims for compensation, pension, and survivors' benefits by mail, fax, or online.

Claimants not yet ready to submit a complete claim may still indicate their “intent to file” a claim by:

- submitting a completed *VA Form 21-0966, Intent to File a Claim for Compensation and/or Pension, or Survivors Pension and/or DIC*,
- contacting the national call center at 1-800-827-1000, or
- initiating an online application for benefits via VA.gov.

However, if claimants are unable to file claims, submit evidence or attend hearings or VA C&P examinations due to COVID-19, VA has the authority to grant time limit extension requests and postpone final actions on a claim, provided good cause is shown for the delay. **VA has determined that delays due to COVID-19 constitute good cause.**

Time Limit Extensions Based on COVID-19

Effective March 1, 2020, if a claimant or authorized representative requests an extension of a time limit associated with a required action or notes their inability to attend a virtual hearing or tele-C&P examination based on the COVID-19 pandemic, Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA) will grant these requests under the good cause provisions, provided the time limit would have expired or situation occurred on or after March 1, 2020 and until 60 calendar days from the date the President ends the national state of emergency.

Requesting Time Limit Extensions for Claims/Appeals Filings Based on COVID-19

As there is no specific form requirement for requesting good cause extensions of time limits, VBA will accept COVID-19 pandemic-related extension requests on any form or written documentation.

To request an extension of filing a claim or appeal due to COVID-19, claimants should:

- note the request on their late-filed application, or
- attach the request as a separate document to their late-filed application.

To ensure full consideration of a time limit extension, claimants should simply note in their request that they are requesting an exemption for timely filing because of COVID-19, (or any related reference to COVID-19, coronavirus, the national pandemic, or similar language). No supporting evidence is required.

If the request is submitted after initial submission of a pending claim or appeal, claimants should specify the time limit for which they are seeking an extension to ensure accurate processing. Extensions for legacy appeal and claim filing time limits must be received in writing.

Requesting an Extension for Evidence Submission Based on COVID-19

Claimants who have already filed a claim may continue to submit requests in writing or over the telephone (1-800-827-1000) for extensions related to evidence submissions. A note will be placed in claimants' records stating no final action should be taken until the evidence is submitted or the extension period concludes.

Requesting an Extension for Hearings or Virtual/Tele-C&P Exams Based on COVID-19

VBA will contact claimants who have already filed a claim or appeal and have VBA hearings or C&P examinations to provide options that do not involve in-person communications (such as virtual or telephone options). If alternatives to in-person hearings or examinations are not possible for the claimant, a note will be placed in the record stating no final action should be taken until a hearing or exam is completed.