Emergency Excused Absence Pay Policy: Frequently Asked Questions for Employees

Q: What changes are being made to Emergency Excused Absence pay?
A: Since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, the University has continued to pay employees 100% of their regular pay, even if they were fully or partially idled due to the pandemic. Beginning on January 24, 2021, fully and partially idled employees will continue to be eligible for Emergency Excused Absence pay at a reduced rate of 70%.

Q: Can PTO be used to supplement the reduced Emergency Excused Absence pay?
A: Yes, employees may supplement the Emergency Excused Absence pay with accrued vacation, longer service vacation, and personal time.

Q: Will there be an impact on employees’ health and welfare benefits when they are receiving Emergency Excused Absence pay?
A: Employees who are receiving Emergency Excused Absence pay will be eligible to continue their health and welfare benefits. Employees may experience a reduced University pension contribution and reduced MA Paid Family Medical Leave wage replacement benefits because those are based on actual employee earnings.

Q: Will there be a change to the medical plan salary tiers of employees receiving Emergency Excused Absence pay?
A: No, the FTE salary of employees receiving Emergency Excused Absence pay will not change and, therefore, their medical plan salary tiers will remain unchanged.

Q: Will there be an impact on PTO accruals for employees receiving Emergency Excused Absence pay?
A: No, employees will continue to accrue PTO at the same rate.

Q: Can employees receiving Emergency Excused Absence pay use Dependent Well Care?
A: Employees who are fully idle may not use Dependent Well Care, as it is a benefit available to assist employees who are scheduled to work. Employees who are partially idle may use Dependent Well Care during time that they are scheduled to work but have well dependents whose schooling or care arrangements have been disrupted, subject to manager approval.

Q: Are employees who receive Emergency Excused Absence pay eligible for unemployment?
A: Employees may be eligible for unemployment benefits. However, the earnings or salary the employee continues to receive from Harvard and the supplemental use of paid time off may reduce or eliminate eligibility for unemployment benefits. The Massachusetts Department of Unemployment Assistance (DUA) will determine whether or not applicants are eligible for benefits based on their reduction in earnings. The DUA offers the following online calculators to assist applicants with determining their potential unemployment benefits:

   Benefits Calculator
   Working Part-time While Receiving Benefits Calculator

Employees can find additional information at Massachusetts COVID-19 Unemployment Information.
The Department of Unemployment Assistance advises that applicants should apply for unemployment benefits during their first week of total or partial unemployment. If they apply too early, their claim could be denied and they would have to reapply.

Q: Can employees receiving Emergency Excused Absence pay seek employment outside of Harvard?
A: Yes, but the employee must be available to return to work at the University with very short notice. In addition, outside employment must not interfere with partially idled employees’ work at Harvard. Employees should be aware that employment with an outside employer may affect their eligibility for unemployment benefits or the amount of benefits they receive.

Q: How much notice will managers give to employees when there is work available for them?
A: Employees must be ready and available to work in order to be eligible to receive Emergency Excused Absence Pay. Therefore, employees must be available to work with very short notice.