April 8, 2020

COVID-19 Relief Fund: Frequently Asked Questions

What is the COVID-19 Relief Fund?

- The COVID-19 Relief Fund provides targeted bill relief for eligible BC Hydro residential and small business customers that have been hardest hit the by COVID-19 pandemic.
- Residential customers that have lost their income as a result of COVID-19 will be able to apply for a bill credit of three times their average monthly bill.
- Small business customers that close as a result of COVID-19 measures can apply to have their electricity use charges waived for up to three months.
- Eligible large industrial customers can apply to defer up to 50% of their electricity use charges for three months.

When does the program start and how do customers apply?

- Eligible residential customers can apply for the COVID-19 Relief Fund as of April 8, and small business customers can apply starting at the end of next week.
    - Customers have up until June 30, 2020 to apply for bill relief.
    - Customers will receive the same bill relief regardless of when they apply.
- Full program details and application forms are available at bchydro.com/covid19relief.
- Industrial customers can apply up until April 30, 2020 by contacting their Key Account Manager.

RESIDENTIAL CUSTOMERS

Eligibility and application process

Who is eligible?

- To be eligible for the COVID-19 Relief Fund, residential customers must be a residential account holder and have had their account since March 31, 2020 and they or their partner/spouse must have lost employment or income due to COVID-19, because of:
    - a job lay-off;
    - being quarantined or sick with COVID-19;
    - taking care of a family member that is sick with COVID-19;
    - providing care for their children due to school and daycare closures; or, be unable to earn self-employment income
- Average monthly electricity consumption is less than 2,500 kilowatt hours.
- In addition, customers must be eligible for [Employment Insurance](#) and provide a record of employment, or be eligible for the [Canada Emergency Response Benefit](#) or [B.C.'s Emergency Response Benefit for Workers](#).
- Proof of eligibility will be required as part of their application.

What type of proof do customers need to provide with their application?

- The application process will require residential customers to provide proof of job loss or inability to work due to COVID-19.
- Customers must be able to upload their record of employment, termination notice or other documents that show proof of eligibility for Employment Insurance, the Canada Emergency Response Benefit or B.C.'s Emergency Response Benefit for Workers.
- Full program details and application forms are available at bchydro.com/covid19relief.

When can approved recipients of the Canada Emergency Response Benefit apply?
- Although providing proof of approval for the newly launched Canada Emergency Response Benefit (CERB) is not yet an option for demonstrating eligibility for the COVID-19 Relief Fund, customers can apply now as long as they can provide other forms of proof that they have stopped working because of COVID-19.
- BC Hydro is working to understand how to best align the COVID-19 Relief Fund with the Canada Emergency Response Benefit.

What about a renter that has their hydro costs included as part of their monthly rent?
- Unfortunately, due to limitations with an individual in this situation not being a BC Hydro customer or having a BC Hydro account, BC Hydro is not able to offer a credit.
- We encourage renters to reach out to their landlord to discuss options.

What about customers that are self-employed but not earning income?
- Customers that are self-employed but not earning income due to COVID-19 are eligible.
- BC Hydro is working to find a way for those that are self-employed to demonstrate loss of income and allow them to qualify.

What about essential workers, seniors or those on disability?
- Customers that do not meet the eligibility requirements for the COVID-19 Relief Fund but are having difficulty paying their BC Hydro bill are encouraged to call BC Hydro's customer team at 1-800-BCHYDRO (1-800-224-9376) to discuss options such as bill deferrals or a payment plan.
- Customers are also encouraged to see if they qualify for BC Hydro's Customer Crisis Fund; details can be found at bchydro.com/ccf.

Can residential customers apply more than once under different accounts?
- There is a maximum of one credit for residential customers per account holder and spouse/partner, regardless of the number of residential accounts held.

What if a customer does not meet the eligibility requirements?
- Customers that do not meet the eligibility requirements for the COVID-19 Relief Fund but are having difficulty paying their BC Hydro bill are encouraged to call BC Hydro's customer team at 1-800-BCHYDRO (1-800-224-9376) to discuss options such as bill deferrals or a payment plan.
- Customers are also encouraged to see if they qualify for BC Hydro's Customer Crisis Fund; details can be found at bchydro.com/ccf.

Bill credit

How much will the average residential customer receive?
- The amount received will be based on the individual customer's average monthly bill amount over the past 12-months (or the amount of time they have been at their premise if less than 12 months).
  - For the average apartment dweller, this is around $135.
  - For the average single-family home, this is around $335.

Do customers have to re-pay the credit?
- No, the credit does not have to be repaid.

How is the bill credit amount calculated?
- The bill credit will be calculated based on three months average monthly electricity consumption between April 1, 2019 and March 31, 2020 for the account associated with the application.

When can a customer expect to receive their credit?
- BC Hydro is working to process applications as quickly as possible to get credits to those who need it.
- Customers that submit their application will be contacted via email with an update on their application as soon as it is available, or if additional information is required.
- BC Hydro is not adding late payment charges or disconnection customers for non-payment at this time.

How will customers receive their credit?
- Customers that have their applications approved will have the credit amount applied directly to their BC Hydro account.

Other BC Hydro programs

How is this program different from the COVID-19 Customer Assistance Program?
- In March, BC Hydro introduced the COVID-19 Customer Assistance Program to provide all residential and commercial customers the option to defer payments, or arrange a flexible payment plan to help pay their BC Hydro bills.
- Customers can call 1-800-BCHYDRO (1-800-224-9376) to discuss options.

How is the COVID-19 Relief Fund different from the Customer Crisis Fund (CCF)?
- The Customer Crisis Fund has been offered since 2018 and is for residential customers that are facing a significant financial hardship and possible disconnection of their service due to a life crisis such as job loss, injury, illness or loss of a family member.
- To be eligible for the Customer Crisis Fund, customers must provide proof that they are in financial crisis and facing possible disconnection of their BC Hydro service, whereas to be eligible for the COVID-19 Relief Fund, they just have to show they have lost their income as a result of COVID-19.
- Residential customers that don't currently have outstanding balances and that have stopped working as a result of COVID-19 should apply to the COVID-19 Relief Fund, not the Customer Crisis Fund.

Can customers receive grants through the Customer Crisis Fun and a credit from the COVID-19 Relief Fund?
- Some customers that are eligible for the relief under the COVID Relief Fund may also be eligible to access grants of up to $600 through our Customer Crisis Fund to help cover arrears incurred prior to the COVID-19 pandemic.

SMALL BUSINESS CUSTOMERS

What businesses qualify?
- Business must fall under BC Hydro's Small General Service Rate (rate schedules: 1300, 1301, 1310, 1311, 1234, 1205).
    - Exceptions include:
        - Unmetered accounts
        - Common areas of multiple occupancy buildings
        - At BC Hydro's discretion, accounts that belong to government, large enterprises, school districts, or large chain stores (excluding franchisees).
- For example, businesses like cafes, barber shops, nail salons and independent coffee shops would be eligible.
- Business that are not eligible include: all levels of Government, schools, large chain stores e.g. Starbucks, McDonalds (franchises are eligible), large companies (Telus, Shaw etc.).

- The business or business location must shut down completely. Businesses that are operating at reduced levels (e.g., restaurants that continue to provide take-out service) are not eligible.

How much will the average small business customer receive?

- Small business customers that have closed their business as a result of COVID-19 will be able to apply to have their electricity costs waived for up to three months.
- The closure can be due to an order from government; or due to reduced transactions/revenues or employee protection.
- The amount waived will depend on the size and type of the business as well as how it's heated and the amount of equipment that must remain operating (e.g., refrigeration) even though the business is closed.

How will the waived charges be calculated?

- BC Hydro will waive an eligible business' energy costs for electricity used at the premise between April 1 and June 30, 2020.
    - If the business closed before April 1, the charges will be waived for three months starting from April 1. If the business closes after April 1, charges will be waived starting from the date of closure until June 30.
- The applicable charges that can be waived include: the basic charge, energy charge and minimum charge.

What if a customer does not meet the eligibility requirements?

- Customers that do not meet the eligibility requirements for the COVID-19 Relief Fund but are having difficulty paying their bill are encouraged to call BC Hydro's customer team at 1-800-BCHYDRO (1-800-224-9376) to discuss options such as bill deferrals or a payment plan.