

Government Services FAQs in the Event of a Government Shutdown

Government shutdowns are disruptive and distracting, impacting many vital services and making it difficult for agencies to deliver for the American people at the same pace. They are also painful for the more than 1.5 million Federal civilian employees – about 25 percent of whom are veterans – and the over 2 million military service members, who would be forced to go without pay during a lapse in appropriations. Of those public servants, roughly 800,000 Federal employees would be furloughed – meaning, they would not be legally allowed to do the work of delivering for the American people every day.

Which Federal employees keep working during a government shutdown?

- When there is a government shutdown, Federal agencies would be required to classify their employees whose salaries have lapsed as either "excepted" or "not excepted." The employees classified as "excepted" would work without pay during the shutdown. The employees classified as "not excepted" would be put on unpaid furlough. Due to the Government Employee Fair Treatment Act of 2019, all Federal employees would be retroactively paid for the duration of the shutdown upon its conclusion.

When would Federal employees miss their first paycheck?

- Federal civilian paychecks for the September 10-23 biweekly pay period would not be delayed. Paycheck dates for that period would vary from September 29-October 5.
- Depending on the length of the shutdown, Federal civilian paychecks for the September 24-October 7 pay period could be delayed. If the government remains shut down when an employee's timekeeping would be finalized for that pay period, their paychecks for the September 24 – October 7 pay period would include pay only for work hours between September 24-30.

What would be the impact on U.S. military personnel and Federal law enforcement?

- All active-duty and Guard and Reservists on active-duty orders, including the U.S. Coast Guard, are excepted and therefore would be required to work, however, like the majority of Federal employees, they would not be paid until after the shutdown is over. All on-base non-acute health care would cease, but off-base care provided through Tricare would not be affected. On-base child care would be open on a case-by-case basis. Federal law enforcement would continue operations, but some law enforcement personnel would not be paid until the shutdown is over.

Would my mail still arrive? What happens to the U.S. Postal Service?

- The U.S. Postal Service has permanent authority to fund its operations from revenues, and U.S. mail and package service would continue without interruption.

Would commercial air travel be affected?

- Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) air traffic controllers, Transportation Security Agency security personnel, and Customs and Border Protection Officers would remain on the job during a shutdown, although they would not be paid until after the shutdown concludes.

This could lead to significant delays and longer wait times for travelers at airports across the country, like there were during previous shutdowns.

Would a shutdown impact passport renewals or applications?

- The Department of State's passport operations would continue to operate during a shutdown. These operations are supported by balances of fees charged and retained by the Department of State that are unaffected by a lapse in appropriations.

Would U.S. embassies overseas remain open for American citizen services during a shutdown?

- The Department of State's consular operations would continue during a shutdown, including routine and emergency American citizen services. These operations are supported by balances of fees charged and retained by the Department of State that are unaffected by a lapse in appropriations.

Would Americans continue to receive Social Security benefits?

- Social Security beneficiaries would continue receiving their Social Security, Social Security Disability Insurance, and SSI payments. The Social Security Administration (SSA) would continue providing limited services such as issuing Social Security cards and holding appointments for benefit applications.
- However, the public may experience increased wait times due to a high volume of inquiries. SSA would cease some activities such as benefit verifications and processing overpayments.

Would Medicare and Medicaid benefits be affected?

- Medicare and Medicaid would be largely unaffected by a government shutdown in October, and current beneficiaries would continue to receive their benefits. Beneficiaries would be able to continue to see their doctor and pick up their prescriptions as normal, with no interruption or delay.

How would a shutdown affect Americans who participate in the WIC program?

- A shutdown risks loss of access to WIC nutrition assistance for the nearly 7 million pregnant and postpartum women, infants, and children who rely on the program. USDA Food and Nutrition Service does not have sufficient funding to support normal WIC operations beyond a few days into a shutdown.
- Some states may have carryover funds or can use their own state funds to continue program operations for different amounts of time.

How would a shutdown affect Federal Student Aid?

- We anticipate that key activities, including loan servicing, would continue for a couple of weeks if shutdown happens on October 1. However, a prolonged shutdown could lead to disruption.
- The Department of Education would do the best it can with the resources available and within the bounds of the law to support the return to repayment effort.

How would a shutdown impact student loan repayment?

- If a shutdown occurs on October 1, we anticipate that key activities, including loan servicing, would continue for a couple of weeks. However, a prolonged shutdown could substantially disrupt the return to repayment effort and long-term servicing support for borrowers.
- The Department of Education would do the best it can with the resources available and within the bounds of the law to support borrowers as they return to repayment.

Would a shutdown impact veterans' access to benefits?

- During a government shutdown, all VA medical facilities and clinics would remain fully operational and VA would continue to process veterans' benefits.

Would military and Federal retiree benefits be suspended?

- Military and Federal retirees would continue to receive their retirement benefits, but processing new applications or other requested changes would be delayed.

What would happen if a natural disaster occurs during the shutdown? How would the shutdown affect FEMA's natural disaster recovery efforts?

- FEMA staff would respond to emergencies and provide critical life and safety disaster assistance, but long-term projects will continue to be delayed due to a lack of funding in the Disaster Relief Fund.
- FEMA implemented Immediate Needs Funding (INF) guidance on August 29 to prioritize available funding to ongoing disaster operations and preserve funding for initial response and recovery activities for any new incident. INF would continue until the DRF is sufficiently replenished.

Would Federal wildland firefighters be called to respond to wildfire incidents during a government shutdown?

- Thousands of Federal wildland firefighters would continue to respond to wildfire incidents during a government shutdown, potentially with delayed compensation.
- Beyond impacts to immediate response needs, a shutdown would result in lost opportunities to complete hazardous fuel treatments, including projects in high-risk fire sheds.

Would the Small Business Administration (SBA) continue to process small business loan requests in the event of a shutdown?

- Under a shutdown, SBA is unable to approve new small business loans (7a and 504, Microloans) or process applications for most government contracting programs (8a, Women-Owned Small Businesses, Service-Disabled Veteran-Owned Businesses).
- A shutdown would disrupt or suspend SBA's management, oversight, and collaboration, nationwide, with entrepreneurial development and technical assistance providers like Small Business Development Centers, SCORE, Women's Business Centers, and U.S. Export Assistance Centers.
- SBA's Disaster Loan Program would continue regular operations

Would a shutdown disrupt USDA support for farmers?

- During a shutdown, USDA would not be able to process new farm loans. Farm income support programs, like Agriculture Risk Coverage, Price Loss Coverage, Dairy Margin Coverage, and Marketing Assistance Loans would discontinue for the duration of the shutdown.
- Additionally, Farm Bill programs, such as the Noninsured Crop Disaster Assistance Program, Livestock Indemnity Program, Livestock Forage Disaster Program, and the Tree Assistance Program would not be available to farmers and ranchers.

What would be the impact on Federal housing loans?

- The Departments of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), Veterans Affairs (VA) and Agriculture (USDA) would all see varied impacts:
 - HUD Federal Housing Administration (FHA) would continue to insure most single-family loans; however, FHA would not insure new Home Equity Conversion Mortgages/reverse mortgages for seniors, and staffing constraints may force HUD to stop processing loans for the Indian Housing Loan Guarantee Program (Section 184) and the Native Hawaiian Housing Loan Guarantee Program (Section 184A).
 - VA would continue its loan guarantee programs and other funded activities provided by the Veterans Benefits Administration. USDA would cease new loan and loan guarantee activity, but would continue to service loans under the protection of property guidance.

What would be the impact on medical research?

- During a shutdown, NIH would use carryover funds to continue support for priority research projects, grants research oversight, and contracting activities that avoid negative impacts that would occur from interruption. NIH would prioritize care of existing patients at the NIH Clinical Center.
- NIH would not enroll new participants in clinical trials, or start new clinical trials, unless the trials are funded by multi-year funding, such as funds provided by the 21st Century Cures Act. NIH would shut down most medical research, prevent the enrollment of patients in studies, and stop making or renewing research grants.

What would be the impact on the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)?

- CDC's immediate response to urgent disease outbreaks and critical investigation needs would continue, though CDC would have a reduced response capacity and would be unable to fully interface with their public health partners at the State and local levels and support grantee work.
- Under a shutdown, CDC's Bridge Access Program would continue to provide no-cost COVID-19 vaccines to adults without health insurance and adults whose insurance does not cover all COVID-19 vaccine costs.
- CDC would maintain laboratory functions, operate the agency's 24/7 emergency operations center, and collect and report critical information needed for state and local health authorities and providers to track, prevent, and treat diseases.

What would be the impact on food safety activities?

- During a shutdown, some food safety activities could be delayed. In 2013, FDA had to delay 900 routine food safety inspections. In 2018, after a brief stoppage, FDA determined they could resume food inspections on high-risk facilities. USDA food safety inspections would continue to ensure the integrity of the Nation's meat, poultry and processed egg products.

How would a shutdown impact the implementation of programs associated with the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA, also known as the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law) and Inflation Reduction Act (IRA)? Would funding associated with recently approved grants be delayed for the duration of a shutdown?

- Because IIJA and IRA, are funded outside of annual appropriations, activities associated with their implementation would generally continue. However, a shutdown may impact administrative functions for a wide range of public services and ongoing investments. As is the case with any program, agencies would have to make determinations about the extent of administrative activities possible on a case-by-case basis.
- Grant funding associated with IIJA and IRA may still be provided during a shutdown. Grants.gov would remain operational during a lapse, but with reduced Federal support staff. The Grants.gov Contact Center would remain open and could provide assistance to callers.

What would be the impact on immigration services provided by U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS), including citizenship applications and green cards?

- USCIS is largely funded outside of the annual appropriations process, so citizenship and immigration services would continue during a shutdown.

Would the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts in Washington D.C. stay open?

- Because the Kennedy Center is funded through ticket sales, it would remain open during a government shutdown.

Would the Smithsonian Institution and National Gallery of Art in Washington D.C. stay open?

- We are anticipating these museums would have enough leftover funding to remain open for a few days or up to a couple of weeks, after which the museums would close to the public.