



VA



U.S. Department
of Veterans Affairs

Filing an Online Dependency Claim

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Q: Am I eligible to add dependents to my VA compensation benefits?

If you have a 30% or higher disability rating from VA, you can add your dependents to your disability compensation benefits. Adding dependents to your benefits means you may be eligible for a higher disability payment, also known as a “benefit rate.”

Q: Who is considered a “dependent?”

Dependents you can add to your benefits compensation include:

- A spouse (including spouses in same-sex marriages and common-law marriages)
- Children (including biological children, step children, and adopted children) who are unmarried and either:
 - Under the age of 18,
 - Between the ages of 18-23 and enrolled in school full time, or
 - Who were seriously disabled before the age of 18
- Parents, whose income and net worth are below the limit set by the law

*NOTE: parents and spouses in common law marriages, cannot be added to your benefits online through eBenefits. See answer to “**How to add a dependent**” for more information.*

Q: How do I add a dependent?

If you haven’t submitted a claim for disability compensation yet, you can add your dependent(s) as part of the claim application process. If VA rates your disability at 30% or higher, your dependent(s) will automatically be factored into your award.

If you’ve already submitted your claim and have received a 30% or higher disability rating, the fastest way to add a dependent is online through eBenefits (www.ebenefits.va.gov). Submitting an electronic dependency claim through eBenefits allows VA to make a decision on your claim in as little as 48 hours.

Simply log into eBenefits and click “Add or Remove Dependent” under the Apply section. You must have a Premium eBenefits account to file your claim online. If you need help filing your electronic claim, you can also work with an accredited Veterans Service Organization (VSO) who can answer questions or submit the claim on your behalf.

Currently, you cannot add parents or spouses through common law marriages as dependents through eBenefits. To add a parent as a dependent, you must fill out VA Form 21-509, Statement of Dependency of Parent(s). To add a spouse from a common-law marriage as a dependent, you must fill out VA Form 21-686c, Declaration of Status of Dependents.

Q: Why is it better to file my dependency claim online vs. paper?

VA can process electronic dependency claims much faster than paper claims thanks to a new automated processing system. In some cases, filing a dependency claim online through eBenefits could get you a decision in as little as 48 hours.

The online claim application is simple and easy to understand. While paper claims require you to fill out multiple forms, everything VA needs to make a decision is included in one online application. You can also easily upload any supporting documents VA needs to validate your claim right in eBenefits, such as adoption papers and medical records.

Filing your claim online also allows you to save the day you start your claim as the effective date for your benefits if your dependency claim is awarded.

FILING AN ONLINE DEPENDENCY CLAIM FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Q: What should I do if I already submitted a paper claim to add a dependent and am still waiting for a decision?

If you've already submitted a paper dependency claim and haven't received a decision from VA, you can still submit a claim online. If awarded, you can start seeing your benefits sooner. Your paper claim will still be reviewed, and VA will evaluate both the paper and online claim applications. You will be paid back from the date your initial paper claim was submitted.

Q: How do I know if I'm already receiving compensation for my dependents?

If you're not sure whether you're already being paid for your dependents, the easiest thing to do is check eBenefits. Log into your eBenefits account and click the "Dependents" link under the "My Profile" section. If your dependents are already listed there, you should be receiving compensation for them. If they're not listed, file your online dependency claim through eBenefits as soon as possible.

Q: What happens if I get divorced or need to remove a dependent?

The easiest way to remove a dependent is online through eBenefits. It will take longer for VA to process a claim to remove a child compared to removing a spouse, but submitting your information online is still much faster than submitting a paper claim. If you get divorced and need to remove your spouse, VA recommends you submit a claim to remove a dependent as soon as possible. You do not have to submit or upload the supporting paperwork into eBenefits.

If VA finds that you continued to receive compensation for a former spouse or dependent stepchild of that former spouse without notifying VA, it could significantly impact your future benefits payments. VA would work with the Debt Management Center (DMC) to collect the money back that was paid out incorrectly, usually by withholding a certain amount from your monthly checks until the full amount is paid.

Q: Do I have to remove my child from my compensation benefits once they are too old to be claimed as a dependent?

No, VA will track your child's age based on the date of birth you provide when filing your dependency claim. When your child turns 18, they will be removed from your disability compensation if they are not attending school.

Q: I didn't know I could add dependents to my disability compensation benefits. Do I get paid back to the date my spouse and I got married and when my children were born?

VA may pay you back to the date of your marriage or the birth of your child if you had already received your 30% or higher disability rating at that point and:

- Notified VA within one year of the date the dependency arose, and
- Responded within one year to VA's request for any additional information needed to confirm your dependent(s)

If it has been longer than a year since your marriage and/or birth of your child, VA may only pay you back to the date you submitted your dependency claim or, in some cases, only up to one year before you submitted your dependency claim.

Q: How will VA know not to remove my child from my benefits if they turn 18 but are still in school? Do I have to reapply?

If your child is turning 18 and will still be in school (either high school or college), you can update their school information in eBenefits. Simply log into your eBenefits account, click "Add or Remove Dependents" under the "Apply" section on the home page, and select "Update Dependents."

Q: What if my spouse is also a Veteran with a 30% or higher disability rating? Can we claim each other and our children? Or should only one of us add them as dependents?

Both you and your spouse can claim each other and your children if you are both Veterans with a 30% or higher disability rating. However, claiming a dependent spouse who is also a Veteran will take longer for VA to process. You should still submit your claim online through eBenefits to get the fastest decision possible. Filing online will also ensure you get paid back to the date you submitted your claim, if awarded.