

Initial COVID-19 Guidance from U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs

Question One:

What is the impact, if any, to GI Bill recipients when their schools are either closed or has directed their students to take classes online as a result of precautions taken due to COVID-19?

Answer:

The answer will depend on the type of action taken by the school, the timing of the action, and the current program approval.

- If a school temporarily closes due to an established policy based on an Executive order of the President or due to an emergency situation, VA may continue benefit payments (including the Monthly Housing Allowance under the Post-9/11 GI Bill) for up to 4 weeks during an 12 month period. This authority, and limitation, are codified in statute (38 U.S.C. § 3680(a)(2)(A).
- If the school remains open (virtually, rather than physically), and students are transitioned to pursuit solely through online classes, then benefit payments will be impacted as follows:
 - If the switch from training in-residence to online classes occurs during the term, and the program has been approved by the State Approving Agency for delivery through an online modality, then benefit payments (including the Monthly Housing Allowance under the Post-9/11 GI Bill) will remain unchanged for the remainder of that term.
 - However, for any subsequent terms pursued solely online, the Monthly Housing Allowance (MHA) under the Post-9/11 GI Bill will be reduced to one-half of the national average of DoD's Basic Allowance for Housing rates for an E-5 with dependents. The limitations on MHA rates are codified in statute (38 U.S.C. § 3313(c)(1)(B)(iii).
 - Lastly, if the program has not been approved by the State Approving Agency for delivery through an online modality, benefit payments will completely stop (including the Monthly Housing Allowance under the Post-9/11 GI Bill) when students begin training online.

Please note: There is a draft bill to address our limitations, but until that passes we are restricted to what is described above

Question Two:

Can Remedial classes be taught via distance learning?

Answer:

No. This limitation is found in regulations and VA will not ignore the regulations as that would violate the Administrative Procedures Act. Further guidance on re-certification will be provided to SCOs for students who were enrolled in remedial training and then were instructed to stay at home to take their class.

Question Three:

What happens when an approved program at an accredited or non-accredited stand-alone non-college degree (NCD) institution shifts from a resident program to an online modality?

Answer:

If a program is not approved for distance learning, and the law does not allow for the approval of distance learning for the program, then the resident program is the only program payable for GI Bill benefits. Further guidance on re-certification will be provided to SCOs for students who were enrolled in courses that no longer offer the SAA approved modality of instruction.

Question Four:

WEAMS: What does it mean when an accredited IHL distance learning field/box left blank or is marked “no”?

Answer:

SAAAs have full authority to approve programs for online training if the program satisfies the statutory and regulatory requirements. SAA must determine whether a program shall be allowed to offer training through online modality and indicate as such to VA. SAA should communicate any necessary changes to the ELR identified for his/her state using established procedures.

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