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# Nearly 35 million households will lose their utility shutoff protections over the next month

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7-9 minutes

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Throughout the coronavirus pandemic, millions of Americans have relied on [emergency orders put in place by state and local governments](#) that bar utility companies from shutting off services such as gas, electricity and water.

However, many of these orders will expire by the end of September, leaving 34.5 million households without shutoff protections, according to [a new report](#) from energy efficiency startup [Carbon Switch](#).

Governors and public utility commissions in [32 states passed new utility shutoff moratoriums](#) during the pandemic, which prohibited providers from shutting off utilities because of nonpayment. Several states, such as Ohio and Arizona, did not pass new orders but extended seasonal shutoff restrictions during the pandemic. Yet overall, many of these measures were put in place as short-term solutions, so most of the [moratoriums are set to expire soon](#). Ten states have already

had their orders expire, but the bulk are lifting in August, September and October, [Carbon Switch's report finds](#).

Meanwhile, 14 states never issued specific moratoriums at all, instead relying on utility companies to voluntarily keep power on for customers with overdue bills. Yet 8 out of 10 of the nation's biggest utility companies are planning to return to normal operations by Sept. 15 and will start cutting off customers' electricity and gas if the bills are overdue, Carbon Switch reports.

"There's going to be a tidal wave of utility shutoffs," says Michael Thomas, founder and head researcher of Carbon Switch. That's because in some states, as many as a third of households are behind on payments. Typically, only about 7% to 9% of Americans are delinquent on their payments, he says. "It's just crazy by any measure."

Throughout August and September, 14 state moratoriums will expire. Carbon Switch calculates that by October 1, about 76 million households will be without shutoff protections. At that point, only a dozen states and Washington, D.C. will still have moratoriums still in place. Only seven states — California, Connecticut, Kentucky, Maine, Massachusetts, New York and Wyoming — and Washington, D.C. do not have expiration dates set on their moratorium orders, according to Carbon Switch.

About 9.5 million people are currently unemployed in states that are set to have their shutoff protections expire on or before October 1, according to the report's analysis of

the [latest monthly data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics](#).

Another 10 million of the households in those states are currently below the federal poverty line, Carbon Switch finds.

## Effects not felt equally

Prior to the pandemic, low-income Americans and Black and Hispanic households were disproportionately affected by utility shutoffs. Black households earning less than 150% times the federal poverty level were twice as likely to have their electricity shut off as white families with comparable income levels, [National Consumer Law Center analyst John Howat estimates](#).

A [2018 California study](#) found that while Latino utility customers make up roughly a third of people living in PG&E's service territory, 62%, live in ZIP codes with the highest shut off rates.

The pandemic will likely exacerbate these issues, Thomas says. A [recent survey by researchers at Indiana University](#) found that Black respondents were twice as likely as White respondents to report they were unable to pay their utility bills in April or May.

Struggling to pay for utilities can have an impact on Americans' health. Nearly a fourth, 22%, of the [Indiana University respondents](#) said they reduced or cut down on food and medicine in order to pay their utility bills.

“Energy insecurity is already a [widespread problem](#) in the U.S.

It disproportionately affects those at or below the poverty line, Black and Hispanic households, families with young children, people with disabilities and those who use electronic medical devices,” [the researchers wrote](#).

## How to get help with utility bills

If you are struggling to pay your energy, water or telephone bills, contact your utility company directly to ask about bill assistance programs. Only 1% of eligible households take advantage of these programs, the NCLC finds.

You may also qualify for assistance through the [Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program \(LIHEAP\)](#), which is a federal program for low-income families that helps with energy bills. While income eligibility requirements vary by state, generally a four-person household [earning less than \\$36,400 qualifies](#). You can call the National Energy Assistance Referral (NEAR) hotline toll-free at 1-866-674-6327 to get information on where to apply for LIHEAP.

The federally funded program [Temporary Assistance for Needy Families \(TANF\)](#) can help with basic assistance as well as expenses related to housing, food, child care and job training. Each state runs its TANF program differently, but you can [look up each program by state](#).

There are also grants, programs and even charities where you may be able to apply for payment assistance.

[UtilityBillAssistance.com](#) provides a helpful state-by-state breakdown.

If you're struggling to pay your phone bill, the Federal Communications Commission has a [program called Lifeline](#) that provides discounted landline or cell phone service to low-income families.

"There are so many people who have lost parts of their income or all their income," Thomas says, which makes the number of customers at risk for getting their utilities cut off that much higher right now.

Here's a look at the status of each state's shutoff protections.

### Status of state utility moratoriums

State	Moratorium status
Alabama	Always voluntary
Florida	Always voluntary
Idaho	Always voluntary
Michigan	Always voluntary
Missouri	Always voluntary
Nebraska	Always voluntary
Nevada	Always voluntary
New Jersey	Always voluntary
North Dakota	Always voluntary
Ohio	Always voluntary

<b>State</b>	<b>Moratorium status</b>
Oklahoma	Always voluntary
Oregon	Always voluntary
South Dakota	Always voluntary
Utah	Always voluntary
California	Expiration TBD
Connecticut	Expiration TBD
DC	Expiration TBD
Kentucky	Expiration TBD
Maine	Expiration TBD
Massachusetts	Expiration TBD
New York	Expiration TBD
Wyoming	Expiration TBD
Indiana	Expired on August 14
West Virginia	Expired on July 1
Georgia	Expired on July 14
Louisiana	Expired on July 16
Illinois	Expired on July 26
Montana	Expired on June 30
South Carolina	Expired on May 14

<b>State</b>	<b>Moratorium status</b>
Mississippi	Expired on May 26
Iowa	Expired on May 27
Kansas	Expired on May 31
New Mexico	Expires on August 28
Tennessee	Expires on August 29
Alaska	Expires on November 15
Hawaii	Expires on October 1
Arizona	Expires on October 15
Washington	Expires on October 15
New Hampshire	Expires on October 16
Arkansas	Expires on October 18
Pennsylvania	Expires on September 06
Maryland	Expires on September 1
North Carolina	Expires on September 1
Wisconsin	Expires on September 1
Minnesota	Expires on September 11
Virginia	Expires on August 31
Rhode Island	Expires on September 30
Texas	Expires on September 30

<b>State</b>	<b>Moratorium status</b>
Vermont	Expires on September 30
Delaware	Expires on September 5
Colorado	Expires on September 9