

Unemployment rises in 24 states

By Ben Rooney, staff reporter April 16, 2010: 12:27 PM ET

NEW YORK (CNMoney.com) -- Nearly half of all U.S. states reported rising unemployment rates in March, the government said Friday, with rates above the national average in 11 states and the District of Columbia.

A total of 24 states suffered jobless rate increases in March, according to the Labor Department's monthly report. But rates declined last month in 17 states and the District of Columbia.

On an annual basis, jobless rates increased in 44 states and D.C. in March. That's down from a total of 46 states in February.

The Labor Department [said earlier this month](#) that the nation's economy gained 162,000 jobs in March. But the national unemployment rate held steady at 9.7% for the third month in a row.

Many economists and policymakers expect the nationwide jobless rate to remain elevated for some time to come, even as job growth slowly resumes.

While 11 states recorded jobless rates above the national average, there were 24 states that posted rates below the national figure in March.

In a continuing trend, Michigan's 14.1% jobless rate in March was the highest rate in the nation. Nevada, at 13.4%, had the second highest rate. California, Rhode Island and Florida suffered unemployment rates above 12%.

Jobless rates in California, Florida, Nevada and Georgia all set record highs during March.

North Dakota continued to have the lowest jobless rate in March. The state's 4% rate was followed by South Dakota's 4.8% and Nebraska's 5% unemployment rates.

Friday's report came one day after [lawmakers voted](#) to push back the deadline to file for extended unemployment benefits until June 2, a measure President Obama promptly signed into law.

The measure restores federal unemployment benefits to more than 200,000 jobless Americans who started losing them on April 5 after lawmakers let that deadline pass.

Meanwhile, the strain of high unemployment has drained jobless benefit funds in a majority of states, forcing many to borrow billions from the federal government to help out-of-work Americans.

The National Employment Law Project, an advocacy group, [said last week](#) that 33 states and the Virgin Islands have depleted their funds and borrowed more than \$38.7 billion to provide a safety net. Four others are at the brink of insolvency.