

Wedding Insurance: Protect Your Investment in Your Big Day

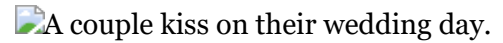
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Many people dream about their perfect wedding. The dress, the cake, the first dance, and more can make the day magical.

 A couple kiss on their wedding day.

But one unforeseen event can ruin it all.

With an average wedding costing \$33,900, nuptials are big investments. Wedding insurance can help protect that money.

“I think it’s very important because it’s a relatively small investment for something where things can go wrong,” says Laura Weatherly, founder of Engaging Affairs, one of Washington DC’s top wedding planners. “It’s a big thing to not insure. We insure cars, we insure houses, we insure jewelry, so honestly it just makes sense for an investment that’s that large to insure it.”

During the era of COVID-19, even with exclusions, wedding insurance is still valuable.

What is Wedding Insurance?

As with any insurance policy, you buy wedding insurance with hopes you never need to use it.

There are two main types of wedding insurance.

- **Cancellation:** This covers non-refundable fees if you have to cancel or postpone a wedding for a covered reason. It can also pay if a vendor doesn’t show up or goes out of business.
- **Liability:** This covers injuries or property damage that can happen at a wedding and usually contains coverage for problems that might come from serving alcohol and liquor. Many venues require liability insurance.

“The liability portion traditionally and statistically has a lot more loss to it than the cancellation coverage does,” says Kerri McDonald, director of operations for Wedsure, one of the largest wedding insurance providers. Wedsure even offers what they call a change of heart policy if someone gets cold feet and calls off the wedding.

Historically, McDonald says, most clients only buy liability coverage and not cancellation coverage because many venues require proof of liability insurance. Often, that turns out to be a good thing. “People don’t realize that most of the claims are usually not postponement, but people getting injured at events, like falling or tripping on stairs or people attending the event cause property damage,” she says.

Wedding insurance policies cover all types of honorees, including same-sex and gender non-conforming couples.

Plans start at about \$100 for a basic plan and go up based on the cost of the wedding and the add-ons and options you choose. For some policies, you can decide to cover additional events like showers, brunches, engagement parties, etc. There are also add-ons for special attire, jewelry, gifts, and more.

“Most [wedding] vendors have non-refundable contracts, so if something happens and a person hasn’t bought wedding insurance, they’re pretty much out of luck as far as getting any of their money back,” McDonald warns.

But during the pandemic, she says, many vendors and venues are trying to work with honorees to move events to later dates.

Is COVID-19 Covered in Wedding Insurance Policies?

Like most insurance policies, wedding insurance covers unexpected events and unforeseen circumstances. That’s key when talking about policies and COVID-19.

Cancellation coverage usually includes if the wedding is canceled or postponed because of a sudden illness or death of an honoree or family member, severe weather like a hurricane or ice storm, bankrupt venue, military deployment, earthquake, fire, or a no-show vendor like the officiant or caterer.

For example, if you have to cancel a wedding because a hurricane hits the area and the policy was in place before the storm was forecast, the cancellation would probably be covered. But if a storm were already heading right for your venue, you wouldn’t be able to buy coverage and the cancellation wouldn’t be covered.

The same goes for COVID-19. Many policies specifically exclude communicable diseases and government actions, so even though governmental ordinances limit gatherings in some areas, that is not a covered reason.

“We have a message on our [online purchasing] system that says nothing is covered due to the coronavirus. If there are any losses due to the coronavirus, they will not be covered by this policy since it is a known circumstance,” McDonald says.

Even so, McDonald says people are still trying to purchase coverage for upcoming events they know are cancelled or yelling at customer service representatives who try to explain why COVID-19 is not a covered event. “People don’t really believe it or don’t want to believe it.”

Even though most policies cover cancellation if either of the honorees, an immediate family member, or a member of the wedding party gets sick or dies, it often depends on the policy’s date of purchase and what the ailment or illness is.

Canceling for fear of something bad happening or because it wouldn’t be any fun with social distancing are also not covered reasons.

Here’s another point to keep in mind: Wedding insurance does not cover a lack of funds, so if you lost your job because of COVID-19 and can’t pay for the wedding, it probably isn’t covered. If the job loss was not coronavirus-related, it might be covered under some policies.

The Future of Wedding Insurance

For policies purchased before COVID-19 became a known event, some companies are paying out for cancellations. Since that is not sustainable as the pandemic continues, some wedding insurers have stopped selling new policies. McDonald says Wedsure never stopped selling cancellation policies since their language already excluded coronavirus and other communicable diseases. Other companies have started selling again with a specific exclusion for COVID-19 and future pandemics.

It's important to remember, COVID-19 isn't the only reason weddings are canceled, so wedding planners still recommend buying wedding insurance policies as soon as you set a date.

"I always tell people to look at how much [you are] going to be out the day of the wedding, that's what you should be insuring ... whether it's invitations or save-the-date costs or even honeymoon expenses," McDonald says.

When buying a wedding insurance policy, look at how the company has handled the past few months. Have they paid claims? Who is their underwriter and is it stable? Have they been easy to work with?

Other things to look for:

- Validity in your state or destination.
- Policy inclusions and exclusions.
- The availability of add-ons.
- The number of events and days covered.
- Covered expenses and approximate wedding cost.

When thinking of COVID-19 and weddings, remember this is something that hasn't happened before and everyone is adapting.

Weatherly says many of her clients are sticking with their original date and getting married in civil or small ceremonies with plans to have a reception in the future.

"It has kind of made people re-evaluate what they want," she says. "We've had clients who were planning a big wedding, but after being in quarantine, they decided they didn't want to spend their money on a huge wedding and when they do reschedule, it's going to be very small. Things that were important before are just not as important now."

Tiffani Sherman is a Florida-based freelance reporter with more than 25 years of experience writing about finance, health, travel and other topics.