

General Notice of COBRA Continuation Coverage Rights

For Cook County Employees and Their Covered Dependents

You are receiving this notice because you are covered under a group health plan (the Plan) that provides medical, dental and/or vision coverage. This notice contains important information about your right to COBRA Continuation Coverage, which is a temporary extension of coverage under the Plan. This notice generally explains COBRA Continuation Coverage, when it may become available to you and your family, and what you need to do to protect the right to receive it.

Cook County is required to send a General Notice of COBRA Continuation Coverage Rights to all active employees, as well as the spouses and dependents of Cook County employees who are enrolled in any of Cook County's health and welfare plans. This requirement is made under the Consolidated Omnibus Budget Reconciliation Act of 1985 (COBRA). COBRA benefits are available for these elements of the Cook County Employee Benefits Program:

- Medical
- Dental
- Vision
- Flexible Spending

When You Need to Act To Protect Your COBRA Rights

Additional explanation is provided below, but it is important to have a basic understanding of these key concepts, each of which requires you to take action to protect your Cook County benefits coverage.

WHEN EMPLOYMENT/ENROLLMENT ENDS. Employees: Should your enrollment in any of the above plans end for a qualified event, except gross misconduct, you will become eligible for COBRA Continuation Coverage and a COBRA enrollment application will be sent to you upon request. Spouses/Partners/Dependents: Should you experience a qualified event that ends your enrollment in any of the above plans and the Employee Benefits Office is notified of this event within 60 days of the effective date of the change, a COBRA enrollment application will be sent to you upon request.

WHEN YOUR FAMILY STATUS CHANGES. Family status changes - such as marriage, divorce, death, birth or adoption of a child, change in work schedule, a spouse going to or leaving work, or a significant change in health coverage - are considered qualified life events and therefore may require a change to your benefits plan. In most cases, you have 31 days from the effective date of the family status change in which to make benefits changes that are consistent with the type of family status change experienced. Some types of family status changes may result in the loss of medical, dental, vision or health care FSA coverage and may trigger a qualifying event under COBRA. To report any such changes to the Employee Benefits Office, you must request an Enrollment/Change Form.

WHEN THERE'S A LEGAL SEPARATION OR DIVORCE, OR WHEN A CHILD REACHES THE PLAN'S MAXIMUM AGE LIMIT. Should you and your spouse legally separate or divorce, or should a child reach the maximum age for coverage under this Plan, a loss of coverage may result. You have an obligation to notify the Employee Benefits Office of this change in your family status within 60 days of the effective date of the change, so that COBRA Continuation Coverage may be offered. If you do not notify us within 60 days and we become aware after the 60-day period has ended, coverage will end retroactively to the date of the family status change, COBRA coverage will not be offered and you may become responsible for any claims incurred after the date coverage ends.

Questions and Answers about COBRA Continuation Coverage

WHAT IS COBRA CONTINUATION COVERAGE?

COBRA Continuation Coverage is a continuation of Plan coverage when the coverage would otherwise end because of a life event known as a "qualifying event." Under the law, COBRA Continuation Coverage must be offered to each person who is a "qualified beneficiary" - that is, each person whose coverage is lost due to the qualifying event. Under the Plan, qualified beneficiaries who elect COBRA Continuation Coverage must pay for this coverage.

WHAT IS A "QUALIFYING EVENT"?

There are different types of qualifying events, as follows:

- **Qualifying events for covered employees.** If you are an employee and you are covered by the Plan, you have a right to choose COBRA Continuation Coverage if you lose your group health coverage because of a reduction in your hours of employment or termination of your employment (for any reason other than your gross misconduct).
- **Qualifying events for covered spouses/partners.** If you are the spouse or domestic partner of an employee covered by the Plan, you have a right to choose COBRA Continuation Coverage if group health coverage under the Plan is lost for any of the following reasons:
 - Your spouse/partner dies;
 - Your spouse's/partner's hours of employment are reduced;
 - Your spouse's/partner's employment ends for any reason other than his or her gross misconduct; or
 - You become divorced or legally separated from your spouse.
- **Qualifying events for covered dependent children.** The dependent child of an employee covered by the Plan has the right to choose COBRA Continuation Coverage if group health coverage under the Plan is lost for any of the following reasons:

- The parent/employee dies;
- The parent/employee's hours of employment are reduced;
- The parent/employee's employment ends for any reason other than his or her gross misconduct;
- The parents become divorced or legally separated; or
- The child becomes ineligible for coverage under the Plan because he or she no longer qualifies as a "dependent child" - e.g., he or she meets the Plan's age limit.

WHEN IS COBRA COVERAGE AVAILABLE?

The County will offer COBRA Continuation Coverage to qualified beneficiaries only after the County has been notified that a qualifying event has occurred.

It Is YOUR Responsibility to Provide Notice of Some Qualifying Events

For qualifying events such as divorce or legal separation, or a dependent child's losing eligibility, you must notify the Employee Benefits Office within **60 days** of the qualifying event. Written notice must be provided to: The Cook County Benefits Office, 118 N. Clark, Room 1072, Chicago, IL 60602.

HOW IS COBRA COVERAGE PROVIDED?

Once the County receives notice that a qualifying event has occurred, COBRA Continuation Coverage will be offered to each of the qualified beneficiaries. Each qualified beneficiary will have an independent right to elect COBRA Continuation Coverage. The maximum period allowed to elect COBRA is **60 days** from the date coverage is lost under the County. The Plan does not provide an extension of the election period beyond what is required by law. **If a qualified beneficiary does not**

elect COBRA Continuation Coverage within this 60-day election period, then rights to continue health insurance end.

If you choose COBRA Continuation Coverage, the law indicates that you must be given coverage that, as of the time coverage is being provided, is identical to the coverage provided under the County's Plan to similarly situated employees and/or family members.

COBRA continuation coverage is a **temporary** continuation of coverage.

- When the qualifying event is the death of the employee, your divorce or legal separation, or a dependent child's losing eligibility, COBRA continuation coverage lasts for up to a total of 36 months.
- When the qualifying event is the end of employment or reduction of the employee's hours of employment, COBRA continuation coverage generally lasts for only up to a total of 18 months.

If you or anyone in your family covered under the Plan is determined by the Social Security Administration to be disabled, and you notify the County in a timely fashion, you may be entitled to receive up to an additional 11 months of COBRA Continuation Coverage, for a total maximum of 29 months. The disability would have to have started at some time before the 60th day of COBRA Continuation Coverage and must last at least until the end of the 18-month period of that coverage. The Plan Administrator must receive the notification before the end of the 18-month period. To apply for this extension as an active employee, you first must apply to the Social Security Administration for disability benefits; you'll receive written notice of its determination. This written notice from the Social Security Administration, along with the County's disabled dependent form, must be sent to: Cook County Employee Benefits Office, 118 N. Clark, Room 1072, Chicago, IL 60602.

WHEN DOES COBRA COVERAGE END?

The law also provides that COBRA Continuation Coverage may end for any of the following reasons:

- Your employer no longer provides group health coverage to any of its employees;
- The premium for continuation coverage is not paid on time; or
- A qualified beneficiary becomes covered under another group health plan, after the date of the qualified beneficiary's COBRA election, and that new plan does not contain any exclusion or limitation with respect to any pre-existing conditions such qualified beneficiary may have.

WHAT HAPPENS TO FLEXIBLE SPENDING ACCOUNT DOLLARS?

If you are eligible for coverage under the health care flexible spending account, that coverage will continue **only** for the remainder of the Plan year in which your qualifying event occurred. The FSA account will be limited to the total amount withheld from the employee's payroll.

WHAT COSTS ARE INVOLVED?

Under the law, you have to pay the COBRA premium in full for your Continuation Coverage. The initial premium payment must be paid within **45 days** of your COBRA election date. Payments are retroactive to the date your coverage is terminated and must be paid in full within **45 days** of the COBRA election date.

Payments are due on the first of each month and must be made in the form of a money order, cashiers' check or certified check made payable to Cook County COBRA. In compliance with federal legislation, payments post-marked more than 30 days after the due date will not be accepted. Your past-due payments will be returned, and your COBRA coverage will be canceled.

IF YOU HAVE QUESTIONS

If you have any questions about the Plan or COBRA law, or if you need to provide notification of a divorce, legal separation or a child losing dependent status, please contact: Cook County Benefits Office, 118 N. Clark, Room 1072, Chicago, IL 60602.

KEEP YOUR PLAN INFORMED OF ADDRESS CHANGES

In order to protect your family's rights, you should keep the County informed of any changes in the addresses of family members. You should also keep a copy, for your records, of any notices you send to the County.

For Additional Information

Cook County Benefits Office
1-312-603-6385
118 N. Clark, Room 1072
Chicago, IL 60602
www.cookcountyrisk.com

BlueCross BlueShield of Illinois PPO
1-800-960-8809 (press 3)
www.bcbsil.com

HMO Illinois (a BlueCross BlueShield HMO)
1-800-892-2803 (press 2)
www.bcbsil.com

UniCare HMO
1-888-234-8855
www.unicare.com

First Commonwealth Dental HMO/PPO
HMO: 1-866-494-4542
PPO: 1-866-302-4542
www.firstcommonwealth.net

Cole Vision
1-800-334-7591
www.colemanagedvision.com

Wageworks (Flexible Spending)
1-877-924-3967
www.wageworks.com

AETNA Term Life Insurance
Portability/Conversion: 1-800-826-7448
www.aetna.com

American General Universal Life Insurance
1-800-231-3655