



ESTABLISHED 1855

Insurance Policyholder Information about Continuation Coverage

Most enrollees in our group health insurance plans have the right to continue coverage for a certain period of time at their own expense following termination of employment, a reduction in work hours that results in ineligibility for insurance, lapse of Lake County Medical Society (LCMS) membership, divorce from or the death of policyholder. In most situations, family members who have been covered under family plans also have the independent right to continue coverage. Employers should notify covered employees and families about these options. Although we can provide general information in this document, there is more detail about continuation coverage in the benefit booklets from Blue Cross Blue Shield of Illinois (BCBSIL). Booklets are posted on the Insurance page of our Web site: LCMSIllinois.org, and they are updated annually. Many important notices, periodic newsletters for our members and some useful forms can be found there as well.

Enrollees who work for small employer groups (less than 20 employees) usually fall under Illinois law with respect to continuation coverage. If they have had continuous coverage for the three full months prior to termination, they can continue coverage for up to 12 months at their own expense. Most spouses who have reached age 55 at the time coverage terminates, or following divorce from, or the death of a policyholder, may continue coverage until they are remarried, covered by Medicare or another health insurance plan. Children who reach the limiting age of 26 for coverage under family policies can continue coverage as individual policyholders for 24 months. The employer and the Lake County Medical Society must be notified in writing in a timely manner after family coverage ends if a child chooses to continue coverage for the allowable time. Under COBRA, family members have the independent right to continue coverage, even if the terminating policyholder (or employee) elects *not* to continue.

Larger employer groups (with 20 or more employees) should provide specific COBRA notices, including an election form for terminating employees and covered family members. They usually have at least 18 months of continuation coverage available. Although LCMS cannot serve as a COBRA administrator for employers, we can recommend some professional COBRA administrators for your consideration.

Everyone should be aware that if there is no interruption in group health insurance coverage for 63 days or longer, such as when a person is between jobs, you can be protected from a waiting period for coverage of any preexisting conditions under a new group plan with careful planning and by extending your previous coverage on a month by month basis. It can be very important to continue group health coverage, even though it can be expensive. Conversion policies are usually available from BCBSIL for those who are left without insurance after a continuation period ends under a group plan. Conversion policies are not the same as the group policies, but they can be valuable to those who need extended coverage.

It is not possible to address all of the circumstances for continuation coverage in this document. Members and enrollees are welcome to contact us with questions, or refer to your benefit booklet. Call 847-482-0222, or email to LakeDocs@aol.com. If you use email, please include your full name. See also: BCBSIL, "Notice, Continuation Rights Under COBRA" on our web site LCMSIllinois.org.

Resources: Illinois Department of Consumer Health, Consumer Services Section (312) 814-2427 www.ins.state.il.us

The information in this article should not be construed as legal advice or as a legal opinion on any specific facts or circumstances, and is not intended to replace the advice of independent legal counsel. These notices are for the information of members of the Lake County Medical Society group insurance plan. Continuation Info 5.2011