

Mysteries of Medicare: What happens if you lose your Employer Group Health Plan when you are eligible for Medicare?

Some people choose to work past their age of eligibility for Medicare. As long as you have coverage with an Employer Group Health Plan (EGHP) larger than 20 employees through your or your spouse's current active employment, you do not need to enroll in Medicare when you turn 65. Many people in this situation enroll in Medicare Part A and defer Part B until the EGHP ends. The transition from EGHP to Medicare and private insurance is usually planned; but what happens if you suddenly lose your job and employer medical benefits - as may have happened to Medicare-eligible individuals in this recent and on-going pandemic?

Even though your Medicare Special Enrollment Period continues for 8 months after losing your EGHP, to avoid being without coverage or incurring penalties, enrolling in both parts of Medicare should be the first item on your immediate action plan. Your Special Enrollment Period for enrolling in a new prescription drug plan is only 63 days and is dependent on having at least one part of Medicare. You need both parts of Medicare to complete your coverage with either a Medigap plan or a Medicare Advantage Plan.

Medicare enrollment is facilitated by the Social Security Administration. If you are just adding Part B, Social Security has recently created a special portal on www.ssa.gov to allow for online Part B enrollment during the pandemic. On the website, look for the "Medicare Enrollment" window and then scroll down to "Apply Online for Medicare Part B During a Special Enrollment Period." Medicare coverage begins the first of the month after you enroll, unless you specify a different date.

You can also submit your enrollment request during this SEP by doing one of the following:

1. Fax your forms CMS-40B and CMS-L 564 and documentation of EGHP to 1- 833-914-2016. Forms are available on the SSA website under "Forms". Send a cover letter with the forms and keep copies of everything.
2. Mail forms CMS-40B and CMS-L564 and documentation of EGHP to your SSA local field office.

For help with this process, contact the PA MEDI program at 610-344-5004, option 2, with questions and some additional clarification. PA MEDI is Pennsylvania's program of free insurance consultation under the auspices of the Chester County Department of Aging.