

§ 146.117 Special enrollment periods.

(a) *Special enrollment for certain individuals who lose coverage*—(1) *In general.* A group health plan, and a health insurance issuer offering health insurance coverage in connection with a group health plan, is required to permit current employees and dependents (as defined in § 144.103 of this chapter) who are described in paragraph (a)(2) of this section to enroll for coverage under the terms of the plan if the conditions in paragraph (a)(3) of this section are satisfied. The special enrollment rights under this paragraph (a) apply without regard to the dates on which an individual would otherwise be able to enroll under the plan.

(2) *Individuals eligible for special enrollment*—(i) *When employee loses coverage.* A current employee and any dependents (including the employee's spouse) each are eligible for special enrollment in any benefit package under the plan (subject to plan eligibility rules conditioning dependent enrollment on enrollment of the employee) if—

(A) The employee and the dependents are otherwise eligible to enroll in the benefit package;

(B) When coverage under the plan was previously offered, the employee had coverage under any group health plan or health insurance coverage; and

(C) The employee satisfies the conditions of paragraph (a)(3)(i), (ii), or (iii) of this section and, if applicable, paragraph (a)(3)(iv) of this section.

(ii) *When dependent loses coverage.* (A) A dependent of a current employee (including the employee's spouse) and the employee each are eligible for special enrollment in any benefit package under the plan (subject to plan eligibility rules conditioning dependent enrollment on enrollment of the employee) if—

(1) The dependent and the employee are otherwise eligible to enroll in the benefit package;

(2) When coverage under the plan was previously offered, the dependent had coverage under any group health plan or health insurance coverage; and

(3) The dependent satisfies the conditions of paragraph (a)(3)(i), (ii), or (iii) of this section and, if applicable, paragraph (a)(3)(iv) of this section.

(B) However, the plan or issuer is not required to enroll any other dependent unless that dependent satisfies the criteria of this paragraph (a)(2)(ii), or the employee satisfies the criteria of paragraph (a)(2)(i) of this section.

(iii) *Examples.* The rules of this paragraph (a)(2) are illustrated by the following examples:

Example 1—(i) *Facts.* Individual A works for Employer X. A, A's spouse, and A's dependent children are eligible but not enrolled for coverage under X's group health plan. A's spouse works for Employer Y and at the time coverage was offered under X's plan, A was enrolled in coverage under Y's plan. Then, A loses eligibility for coverage under Y's plan.

(ii) *Conclusion.* In this *Example 1*, because *A* satisfies the conditions for special enrollment under paragraph (a)(2)(i) of this section, *A*, *A*'s spouse, and *A*'s dependent children are eligible for special enrollment under *X*'s plan.

Example 2—(i) *Facts.* Individual *A* and *A*'s spouse are eligible but not enrolled for coverage under Group Health Plan *P* maintained by *A*'s employer. When *A* was first presented with an opportunity to enroll *A* and *A*'s spouse, they did not have other coverage. Later, *A* and *A*'s spouse enroll in Group Health Plan *Q* maintained by the employer of *A*'s spouse. During a subsequent open enrollment period in *P*, *A* and *A*'s spouse did not enroll because of their coverage under *Q*. They then lose eligibility for coverage under *Q*.

(ii) *Conclusion.* In this *Example 2*, because *A* and *A*'s spouse were covered under *Q* when they did not enroll in *P* during open enrollment, they satisfy the conditions for special enrollment under paragraphs (a)(2)(i) and (ii) of this section. Consequently, *A* and *A*'s spouse are eligible for special enrollment under *P*.

Example 3—(i) *Facts.* Individual *B* works for Employer *X*. *B* and *B*'s spouse are eligible but not enrolled for coverage under *X*'s group health plan. *B*'s spouse works for Employer *Y* and at the time coverage was offered under *X*'s plan, *B*'s spouse was enrolled in self-only coverage under *Y*'s group health plan. Then, *B*'s spouse loses eligibility for coverage under *Y*'s plan.

(ii) *Conclusion.* In this *Example 3*, because *B*'s spouse satisfies the conditions for special enrollment under paragraph (a)(2)(ii) of this section, both *B* and *B*'s spouse are eligible for special enrollment under *X*'s plan.

Example 4—(i) *Facts.* Individual *A* works for Employer *X*. *X* maintains a group health plan with two benefit packages—an HMO option and an indemnity option. Self-only and family coverage are available under both options. *A* enrolls for self-only coverage in the HMO option. *A*'s spouse works for Employer *Y* and was enrolled for self-only coverage under *Y*'s plan at the time coverage was offered under *X*'s plan. Then, *A*'s spouse loses coverage under *Y*'s plan. *A* requests special enrollment for *A* and *A*'s spouse under the plan's indemnity option.

(ii) *Conclusion.* In this *Example 4*, because *A*'s spouse satisfies the conditions for special enrollment under paragraph (a)(2)(ii) of this section, both *A* and *A*'s spouse can enroll in either benefit package under *X*'s plan. Therefore, if *A* requests enrollment in accordance with the requirements of this section, the plan must allow *A* and *A*'s spouse to enroll in the indemnity option.

(3) *Conditions for special enrollment*—(i) *Loss of eligibility for coverage.* In the case of an employee or dependent who has coverage that is not COBRA continuation coverage, the conditions of this paragraph (a)(3)(i) are satisfied at the time the coverage is terminated as a result of loss of eligibility (regardless of whether the individual is eligible for or elects COBRA continuation coverage). Loss of eligibility under this paragraph (a)(3)(i) does not include a loss due to the failure of the employee or dependent to pay premiums on a timely basis or termination of coverage for cause (such as making a fraudulent claim or an intentional misrepresentation of a material fact in connection with the plan). Loss of eligibility for coverage under this paragraph (a)(3)(i) includes (but is not limited to)—

(A) Loss of eligibility for coverage as a result of legal separation, divorce, cessation of dependent status (such as attaining the maximum age to be eligible as a dependent child under the plan), death of an employee, termination of employment, reduction in the number of hours of employment, and any loss of eligibility for coverage after a period that is measured by reference to any of the foregoing;

(B) In the case of coverage offered through an HMO, or other arrangement, in the individual market that does not provide benefits to individuals who no longer reside, live, or work in a service area, loss of coverage because an individual no longer resides, lives, or works in the service area (whether or not within the choice of the individual);

(C) In the case of coverage offered through an HMO, or other arrangement, in the group market that does not provide benefits to individuals who no longer reside, live, or work in a service area, loss of coverage because an individual no longer resides, lives, or works in the service area (whether or not within the choice of the individual), and no other benefit package is available to the individual; and

(D) A situation in which a plan no longer offers any benefits to the class of similarly situated individuals (as described in § 146.121(d)) that includes the individual.

(ii) *Termination of employer contributions.* In the case of an employee or dependent who has coverage that is not COBRA continuation coverage, the conditions of this paragraph (a)(3)(ii) are satisfied at the time employer contributions towards the employee's or dependent's coverage terminate. Employer contributions include contributions by any current or former employer that was contributing to coverage for the employee or dependent.

(iii) *Exhaustion of COBRA continuation coverage.* In the case of an employee or dependent who has coverage that is COBRA continuation coverage, the conditions of this paragraph (a)(3)(iii) are satisfied at the time the COBRA continuation coverage is exhausted. For purposes of this paragraph (a)(3)(iii), an individual who satisfies the conditions for special enrollment of paragraph (a)(3)(i) of this section, does not enroll, and instead elects and exhausts COBRA continuation coverage satisfies the conditions of this paragraph (a)(3)(iii). (*Exhaustion of COBRA continuation coverage* is defined in § 144.103 of this chapter.)

(iv) *Written statement.* A plan may require an employee declining coverage (for the employee or any dependent of the employee) to state in writing whether the coverage is being declined due to other health coverage only if, at or before the time the employee declines coverage, the employee is provided with notice of the requirement to provide the statement (and the consequences of the employee's failure to provide the statement). If a plan requires such a statement, and an employee does not provide it, the plan is not required to provide special enrollment to the employee or any dependent of the employee under this paragraph (a)(3). A plan must treat an employee as having satisfied the plan requirement permitted under this paragraph (a)(3)(iv) if the employee provides a written statement that coverage was being declined because the employee or dependent had other coverage; a plan cannot require anything more for the employee to satisfy the plan's requirement to provide a written statement. (For example, the plan cannot require that the statement be notarized.)

(v) The rules of this paragraph (a)(3) are illustrated by the following examples:

Example 1.(i) *Facts.* Individual *D* enrolls in a group health plan maintained by Employer *Y*. At the time *D* enrolls, *Y* pays 70 percent of the cost of employee coverage and *D* pays the rest. *Y* announces that beginning January 1, *Y* will no longer make employer contributions towards the coverage. Employees may maintain coverage, however, if they pay the total cost of the coverage.

(ii) *Conclusion.* In this *Example 1*, employer contributions towards *D*'s coverage ceased on January 1 and the conditions of paragraph (a)(3)(ii) of this section are satisfied on this date (regardless of whether *D* elects to pay the total cost and continue coverage under *Y*'s plan).

Example 2.(i) *Facts.* A group health plan provides coverage through two options—Option 1 and Option 2. Employees can enroll in either option only within 30 days of hire or on January 1 of each year. Employee *A* is eligible for both options and enrolls in Option 1. Effective July 1 the plan terminates coverage under Option 1 and the plan does not create an immediate open enrollment opportunity into Option 2.

(ii) *Conclusion.* In this *Example 2*, *A* has experienced a loss of eligibility for coverage that satisfies paragraph (a)(3)(i) of this section, and has satisfied the other conditions for special enrollment under paragraph (a)(2)(i) of this section. Therefore, if *A* satisfies the other conditions of this paragraph (a), the plan must permit *A* to enroll in Option 2 as a special enrollee. (*A* may also be eligible to enroll in another group health plan, such as a plan maintained by the employer of *A*'s spouse, as a special enrollee.) The outcome would be the same if Option 1 was terminated by an issuer and the plan made no other coverage available to *A*.

Example 3.(i) *Facts.* Individual *C* is covered under a group health plan maintained by Employer *X*. While covered under *X*'s plan, *C* was eligible for but did not enroll in a plan maintained by Employer *Z*, the employer of *C*'s spouse. *C* terminates employment with *X* and loses eligibility for coverage under *X*'s plan. *C* has a special enrollment right to enroll in *Z*'s plan, but *C* instead elects COBRA continuation coverage under *X*'s plan. *C* exhausts COBRA continuation coverage under *X*'s plan and requests special enrollment in *Z*'s plan.

(ii) *Conclusion.* In this *Example 3*, *C* has satisfied the conditions for special enrollment under paragraph (a)(3)(iii) of this section, and has satisfied the other conditions for special enrollment under paragraph (a)(2)(i) of this section. The special enrollment right that *C* had into *Z*'s plan immediately after the loss of eligibility for coverage under *X*'s plan was an offer of coverage under *Z*'s plan. When *C* later exhausts COBRA coverage under *X*'s plan, *C* has a second special enrollment right in *Z*'s plan.

(4) *Applying for special enrollment and effective date of coverage.* (i) A plan or issuer must allow an employee a period of at least 30 days after an event described in paragraph (a)(3) of this section to request enrollment (for the employee or the employee's dependent).

(ii) Coverage must begin no later than the first day of the first calendar month beginning after the date the plan or issuer receives the request for special enrollment.

(b) *Special enrollment with respect to certain dependent beneficiaries—(1) General.* A group health plan, and a health insurance issuer offering health insurance coverage in connection with a

group health plan, that makes coverage available with respect to dependents is required to permit individuals described in paragraph (b)(2) of this section to be enrolled for coverage in a benefit package under the terms of the plan. Paragraph (b)(3) of this section describes the required special enrollment period and the date by which coverage must begin. The special enrollment rights under this paragraph (b) apply without regard to the dates on which an individual would otherwise be able to enroll under the plan.

(2) *Individuals eligible for special enrollment.* An individual is described in this paragraph (b)(2) if the individual is otherwise eligible for coverage in a benefit package under the plan and if the individual is described in paragraph (b)(2)(i), (ii), (iii), (iv), (v), or (vi) of this section.

(i) *Current employee only.* A current employee is described in this paragraph (b)(2)(i) if a person becomes a dependent of the individual through marriage, birth, adoption, or placement for adoption.

(ii) *Spouse of a participant only.* An individual is described in this paragraph (b)(2)(ii) if either—

(A) The individual becomes the spouse of a participant; or

(B) The individual is a spouse of a participant and a child becomes a dependent of the participant through birth, adoption, or placement for adoption.

(iii) *Current employee and spouse.* A current employee and an individual who is or becomes a spouse of such an employee, are described in this paragraph (b)(2)(iii) if either—

(A) The employee and the spouse become married; or

(B) The employee and spouse are married and a child becomes a dependent of the employee through birth, adoption, or placement for adoption.

(iv) *Dependent of a participant only.* An individual is described in this paragraph (b)(2)(iv) if the individual is a dependent (as defined in § 144.103 of this chapter) of a participant and the individual has become a dependent of the participant through marriage, birth, adoption, or placement for adoption.

(v) *Current employee and a new dependent.* A current employee and an individual who is a dependent of the employee, are described in this paragraph (b)(2)(v) if the individual becomes a dependent of the employee through marriage, birth, adoption, or placement for adoption.

(vi) *Current employee, spouse, and a new dependent.* A current employee, the employee's spouse, and the employee's dependent are described in this paragraph (b)(2)(vi) if the dependent becomes a dependent of the employee through marriage, birth, adoption, or placement for adoption.

(3) *Applying for special enrollment and effective date of coverage—*(i) *Request.* A plan or issuer must allow an individual a period of at least 30 days after the date of the marriage, birth, adoption, or placement for adoption (or, if dependent coverage is not generally made available at the time of the marriage, birth, adoption, or placement for adoption, a period of at least 30 days

after the date the plan makes dependent coverage generally available) to request enrollment (for the individual or the individual's dependent).

(ii) *Reasonable procedures for special enrollment.* [Reserved]

(iii) *Date coverage must begin—(A) Marriage.* In the case of marriage, coverage must begin no later than the first day of the first calendar month beginning after the date the plan or issuer receives the request for special enrollment.

(B) *Birth, adoption, or placement for adoption.* Coverage must begin in the case of a dependent's birth on the date of birth and in the case of a dependent's adoption or placement for adoption no later than the date of such adoption or placement for adoption (or, if dependent coverage is not made generally available at the time of the birth, adoption, or placement for adoption, the date the plan makes dependent coverage available).

(4) *Examples.* The rules of this paragraph (b) are illustrated by the following examples:

Example 1.(i) *Facts.* An employer maintains a group health plan that offers all employees employee-only coverage, employee-plus-spouse coverage, or family coverage. Under the terms of the plan, any employee may elect to enroll when first hired (with coverage beginning on the date of hire) or during an annual open enrollment period held each December (with coverage beginning the following January 1). Employee *A* is hired on September 3. *A* is married to *B*, and they have no children. On March 15 in the following year a child *C* is born to *A* and *B*. Before that date, *A* and *B* have not been enrolled in the plan.

(ii) *Conclusion.* In this *Example 1*, the conditions for special enrollment of an employee with a spouse and new dependent under paragraph (b)(2)(vi) of this section are satisfied. If *A* satisfies the conditions of paragraph (b)(3) of this section for requesting enrollment timely, the plan will satisfy this paragraph (b) if it allows *A* to enroll either with employee-only coverage, with employee-plus-spouse coverage (for *A* and *B*), or with family coverage (for *A*, *B*, and *C*). The plan must allow whatever coverage is chosen to begin on March 15, the date of *C*'s birth.

Example 2.(i) *Facts.* Individual *D* works for Employer *X*. *X* maintains a group health plan with two benefit packages—an HMO option and an indemnity option. Self-only and family coverage are available under both options. *D* enrolls for self-only coverage in the HMO option. Then, a child, *E*, is placed for adoption with *D*. Within 30 days of the placement of *E* for adoption, *D* requests enrollment for *D* and *E* under the plan's indemnity option.

(ii) *Conclusion.* In this *Example 2*, *D* and *E* satisfy the conditions for special enrollment under paragraphs (b)(2)(v) and (b)(3) of this section. Therefore, the plan must allow *D* and *E* to enroll in the indemnity coverage, effective as of the date of the placement for adoption.

(c) *Notice of special enrollment.* At or before the time an employee is initially offered the opportunity to enroll in a group health plan, the plan must furnish the employee with a notice of special enrollment that complies with the requirements of this paragraph (c).

(1) *Description of special enrollment rights.* The notice of special enrollment must include a description of special enrollment rights. The following model language may be used to satisfy this requirement:

If you are declining enrollment for yourself or your dependents (including your spouse) because of other health insurance or group health plan coverage, you may be able to enroll yourself and your dependents in this plan if you or your dependents lose eligibility for that other coverage (or if the employer stops contributing towards your or your dependents' other coverage). However, you must request enrollment within [insert "30 days" or any longer period that applies under the plan] after your or your dependents' other coverage ends (or after the employer stops contributing toward the other coverage).

In addition, if you have a new dependent as a result of marriage, birth, adoption, or placement for adoption, you may be able to enroll yourself and your dependents. However, you must request enrollment within [insert "30 days" or any longer period that applies under the plan] after the marriage, birth, adoption, or placement for adoption.

To request special enrollment or obtain more information, contact [insert the name, title, telephone number, and any additional contact information of the appropriate plan representative].

(2) *Additional information that may be required.* The notice of special enrollment must also include, if applicable, the notice described in paragraph (a)(3)(iv) of this section (the notice required to be furnished to an individual declining coverage if the plan requires the reason for declining coverage to be in writing).

(d) *Treatment of special enrollees.* (1) If an individual requests enrollment while the individual is entitled to special enrollment under either paragraph (a) or (b) of this section, the individual is a special enrollee, even if the request for enrollment coincides with a late enrollment opportunity under the plan. Therefore, the individual cannot be treated as a late enrollee.

(2) Special enrollees must be offered all the benefit packages available to similarly situated individuals who enroll when first eligible. For this purpose, any difference in benefits or cost-sharing requirements for different individuals constitutes a different benefit package. In addition, a special enrollee cannot be required to pay more for coverage than a similarly situated individual who enrolls in the same coverage when first eligible.

(3) The rules of this section are illustrated by the following example:

Example.(i) *Facts.* Employer Y maintains a group health plan that has an enrollment period for late enrollees every November 1 through November 30 with coverage effective the following January 1. On October 18, Individual B loses coverage under another group health plan and satisfies the requirements of paragraphs (a)(2), (3), and (4) of this section. B submits a completed application for coverage on November 2.

(ii) *Conclusion.* In this Example, B is a special enrollee. Therefore, even though B's request for enrollment coincides with an open enrollment period, B's coverage is required to be made

effective no later than December 1 (rather than the plan's January 1 effective date for late enrollees).

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