

HARRIS COUNTY, TEXAS

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David Kester, Director

«AddressBlock»

****CONTINUATION COVERAGE RIGHTS UNDER COBRA****

Introduction

You are getting this notice because you recently gained coverage under Harris County Health Benefits (the Plan). This notice has important information about your right to COBRA continuation coverage, which is a temporary extension of coverage under the Plan. **This notice explains COBRA continuation coverage, when it may become available to you and your family, and what you need to do to protect your right to get it.** When you become eligible for COBRA, you may also become eligible for other coverage options that may cost less than COBRA continuation coverage. The right to COBRA continuation coverage was created by a federal law, the Consolidated Omnibus Budget Reconciliation Act of 1985 (COBRA). COBRA continuation coverage can become available to you and other members of your family when group health coverage would otherwise end.

You may have other options available to you when you lose group health coverage. For example, you may be eligible to buy an individual plan through the Health Insurance Marketplace. By enrolling in coverage through the Marketplace, you may qualify for lower costs on your monthly premiums and lower out-of-pocket costs. Additionally, you may qualify for a 30-day special enrollment period for another group health plan for which you are eligible (such as a spouse's plan), even if that plan generally does not accept late enrollees. For more information about your rights and obligations under the Plan and under federal law, you should review the Plan Document available from the Plan Administrator at www.co.harris.tx.us or by calling Benefits at (713) 274-5500.

The Plan Administrator is:

Harris County
Human Resources & Risk Management
1310 Prairie, Suite 400
Houston, TX 77002

COBRA Continuation Coverage

COBRA continuation coverage is a continuation of Plan coverage when it would otherwise end because of a life event. This is also called a "qualifying event." Specific qualifying events are listed later in this notice. After a qualifying event, COBRA continuation coverage must be offered to each person who is a "qualified beneficiary." You, your spouse, and your dependent children could become qualified beneficiaries if coverage under the Plan is lost because of the qualifying event. Under the Plan, qualified beneficiaries who elect COBRA continuation coverage must pay for COBRA continuation coverage.

If you are an employee, you will become a qualified beneficiary if you lose your coverage under the Plan because of the following qualifying events:

- Your hours of employment are reduced, or
- Your employment ends for any reason other than your gross misconduct.

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If you are the spouse of an employee, you will become a qualified beneficiary if you lose your coverage under the Plan because of the following qualifying events:

- Your spouse dies;
- Your spouse's hours of employment are reduced;
- Your spouse's employment ends for any reason other than his or her gross misconduct; or
- You become divorced or legally separated from your spouse.

Your dependent children will become qualified beneficiaries if they lose coverage under the Plan because of the following qualifying events:

- 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 stops being eligible for coverage under the Plan as a "dependent child."

Sometimes, filing a proceeding in bankruptcy under title 11 of the United States Code can be a qualifying event. If a proceeding in bankruptcy is filed with respect to Harris County Health Benefits, and that bankruptcy results in the loss of coverage of any retired employee covered under the Plan, the retired employee will become a qualified beneficiary. The retired employee's spouse, surviving spouse, and dependent children will also become qualified beneficiaries if bankruptcy results in the loss of their coverage under the Plan.

When is COBRA continuation coverage available?

The plan will offer COBRA continuation to qualified beneficiaries only after the Plan Administrator has been notified that a qualifying event has occurred. When the qualifying event is the end of employment or reduction of hours of employment, or death of the employee, or commencement of a proceeding in bankruptcy with respect to the employer or the employee's becoming entitled to Medicare benefits (under Part A, Part B, or both) the employer must notify the Plan Administrator of the qualifying event.

For the other qualifying events (divorce or legal separation of the employee and spouse or a dependent child is losing eligibility for coverage as a dependent child), you must notify the Plan Administrator. The Plan requires you to notify the Plan Administrator within 60 days after the qualifying event occurs. You must send this notice to:

Harris County
Human Resources & Risk Management
1310 Prairie, Suite 400
Houston, TX 77002

How is COBRA continuation coverage provided?

Once the Plan Administrator 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. Covered employees may elect COBRA continuation coverage on behalf of their spouses, and parents may elect COBRA continuation coverage on behalf of their children. For each qualified beneficiary who elects COBRA continuation coverage, COBRA continuation coverage will begin either (1) on the date of the qualifying event or (2) on the date that Plan coverage would otherwise have been lost, depending on the nature of the Plan.

COBRA continuation coverage is a temporary continuation of coverage that generally lasts for 18 months due to employment termination or reduction of hours of work. Certain qualifying events, or a second

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qualifying event during the initial period of coverage, may permit a beneficiary to receive a maximum of 36 months of coverage.

There are also ways in which this 18-month period of COBRA continuation coverage can be extended:

Disability extension of 18-month period of continuation coverage

If you or anyone in your family covered under the Plan is determined by the Social Security Administration to be disabled at any time during the first 60 days of COBRA continuation coverage and you notify the Plan Administrator in a timely fashion, you and your entire family can receive up to an additional 11 months of COBRA continuation coverage, for a total maximum of 29 months. You must make sure that the Plan Administrator is notified of the determination and before the end of the 18-month period of COBRA continuation coverage. This notice should be sent to:

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1310 Prairie, Suite 400
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Second qualifying event extension of 18-month period of continuation coverage

If your family experiences another qualifying event while receiving COBRA continuation coverage, the spouse and dependent children in your family can get additional months of COBRA continuation coverage, up to a maximum of 36 months. This extension is available to the spouse and dependent children if the former employee dies, becomes entitled to Medicare benefits (under Part A, Part B, or both); gets divorced or legally separated; or if the child stops being eligible under the Plan as a dependent child. This extension is only available if the second qualifying event would have caused the spouse or dependent child to lose coverage under the Plan had the first qualifying event not occurred. **In all of these cases, you must make sure that the Plan Administrator is notified of the second qualifying event within 60 days of the second qualifying event. This notice must be sent to:**

Harris County
Human Resources & Risk Management
1310 Prairie, Suite 400
Houston, TX 77002

Are there other coverage options besides COBRA Continuation Coverage?

Yes. Instead of enrolling in COBRA continuation coverage, there may be other coverage options for you and your family through the Health Insurance Marketplace, Medicaid, or other group health plan coverage options (such as a spouse's plan) through what is called a "special enrollment period." Some of these options may cost less than COBRA continuation coverage. You can learn more about many of these options at www.healthcare.gov.

If You Have Questions

If you have questions about your COBRA continuation coverage, you should contact Donald Citizen at 713-274-5500. For more information about your rights under the Employee Retirement Income Security Act (ERISA), including COBRA, the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act, and other laws affecting group health plans, contact the nearest Regional or District Office of the U.S. Department of Labor's Employee Benefits Security Administration (EBSA) in your area or visit www.dol.gov/ebsa. (Addresses and phone numbers of Regional and District EBSA Offices are available through EBSA's website.) For more information about the Marketplace, visit www.HealthCare.gov.

Keep Your Plan Informed of Address Changes

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In order to protect your family's rights, you should keep the Plan Administrator 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 Plan Administrator.

Sincerely,

Donald J. Citizen
Benefits Processor