

Frequently Asked Questions About Medicare Enrollment

When is the Enrollment Period?

For individuals turning 65, your Initial Enrollment Period (IEP) begins three months prior to your 65th birthday and ends three months after your 65th birthday. If you are not collecting Social Security benefits, you will not be automatically enrolled in Medicare A & B. If you are actively employed and want to continue on your group insurance plan, you can delay enrollment into Medicare. However, you want to be sure that your group insurance, including the prescription coverage is “creditable” to Medicare. Creditable means “as good as.” Watch your mail for a letter each year (by October) stating your plan’s status.

When an individual is employed, on their group insurance, and Medicare-eligible, they can sign up for Medicare Parts A and B at any time. You do not need to wait for the group insurance contract to end. It’s highly recommended that you sign up for Medicare a minimum of two months prior to when you want your coverage to begin, but no longer than 3 months prior. Once you have your Medicare card, you can then shop for insurance.

Am I Required to Sign Up for Medicare?

Whether you need to sign up for Medicare depends on **three important factors**:

1. How you get your health insurance now;
2. The number of employees that are in the company where you (or your spouse) work* and;
3. If your group insurance is “creditable.”

*To clarify, ‘work’ means active employment, not retired.

If you (or your spouse) work for an employer or company with 20 or more employees and are enrolled in their group health insurance plan, you can delay Medicare enrollment without penalty if the coverage is creditable.

If you (or your spouse) work for an employer or company with less than 20 employees, typically, you will need to sign up for Medicare when you turn 65 to avoid penalties.

Do I Need to Sign Up for Part A Even Though I’m Still Working?

If you are still working, you can sign up for Medicare Part A even if you have employer-provided health insurance, as most people are eligible for premium-free Part A due to their previous payroll taxes; however, you are not required to do so. If you are contributing to a Health Savings Account (HSA), you don’t want to sign up for Part A (see next section).

How is My HSA Affected?

If you contribute to a Health Savings Account (HSA), you should not enroll in Part A. You cannot contribute to an HSA and also be enrolled in Medicare. If you do, you may be subject to tax penalties. Contributions to a Health Savings Account should be stopped 6 months prior to your Medicare effective date. The funds in your HSA are yours to keep and use for health related expenses which includes most health insurance premiums.

How Do I Sign Up for Medicare?

Signing up for Medicare can be done on-line or in-person at your local Social Security office. Use the following guidelines to be sure you are enrolling at the correct website.

TURNING 65: The link to apply for Social Security benefits AND Medicare, or just Part A only, or Parts A & B, or only Part B: <https://www.ssa.gov/medicare/sign-up>

If you are turning 65 but delaying collecting your Social Security benefits, or if you already have Part A and want to add Part B because you are losing your employer group insurance, the following link will take you to the correct spot: <https://www.medicare.gov/basics/get-started-with-medicare/sign-up/ready-to-sign-up-for-part-a-part-b>

BEYOND 65: If you are beyond the age of 65 and you are leaving your employer group insurance, you will need a completed and signed L564E form from your employer. Use this link to download one: <https://www.cms.gov/medicare/cms-forms/cms-forms/downloads/cms-l564e.pdf> Be sure your HR department signs the form with a wet signature, not an electronic signature.

If you missed your chance to sign up for Medicare when you turned 65 AND you did not have creditable coverage through an employer or you don't have a qualifying enrollment period, then you will need to wait until the General Enrollment Period (January 1 through March 31). You will need to download the appropriate form (CMS-10797) and walk in or mail it to your local Security Office. Use this link for more information and to download the form: <https://www.medicare.gov/basics/get-started-with-medicare/sign-up/when-does-medicare-coverage-start>

SOCIAL SECURITY OFFICE LOCATOR: <https://secure.ssa.gov/ICON/main.jsp>

Can I Stay with my Employer's Individual Coverage Health Reimbursement Arrangement (ICHRA)?

ICHRA is considered an alternative to group insurance, but an ICHRA is not insurance.

If you (or your spouse) get a stipend from your employer to buy your own health insurance, **OR** you (or your spouse) are still working, but don't have health insurance through that job:

- That isn't considered 'creditable coverage' and you need to enroll in Medicare.
- If you become Medicare eligible but you didn't enroll in Medicare and went without insurance, the only time of the year to enroll in Medicare is January 1 through March 31. You may incur late enrollment penalties for Part B and D. These are permanent life-time penalties.

What if I'm on COBRA?

- Sign up for Medicare when you turn 65 to avoid gaps in coverage and a monthly Part B late enrollment penalty.
- Medicare pays first, when you turn 65, so if you do not enroll in Medicare while on COBRA, they may not pay your claims since you are now Medicare-eligible.

What are the Enrollment Periods to Sign Up for a Medicare Insurance Plan?

Original Medicare has deductibles and co-insurance so most people decide to enroll in either a Medicare Supplement (MediGap) Plan or a Medicare Advantage Plan to help cover the cost. When you first are eligible for Medicare, you have an open enrollment period to purchase any insurance plan you want without health questions. Beyond your initial enrollment period, you may be subject to full underwriting and could be denied coverage into a Medigap plan. Medicare Advantage Plans have no health questions but there are certain enrollment periods that you need to adhere to. If you move or leave your employer group insurance, be sure that you don't go without insurance for more than 63 days.

Once you have enrolled in either a Medicare Advantage Plan or Prescription Drug Plan, annual enrollment periods allow you to make a plan change. The Annual Enrollment Period to change either a Medicare Advantage Plan or Prescription Drug Plan is from October 15 to December 7 for a January 1st effective date. Advantage Plan members can also make a one-time change during the Open Enrollment Period which runs from January 1 through March 31 annually.

What insurance you choose will depend on many factors like which doctors you see, prescriptions, premiums, benefits, where you live, and travel considerations. We are here to guide you through the process of enrolling in Medicare and choosing the insurance plan to suit your needs. You must be enrolled in Medicare Parts A and B to purchase either a Medigap Plan or Advantage Plan.

Who Can Help Me With My Medicare Options?

Please feel free to connect with us at www.liferesourcesgroup.com and click Contact Us. We will put you in touch with a licensed agent in your region. We work with brokers who represent a large selection of insurance carriers and there is never a cost or obligation for our assistance.