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To: Extended Coverage/COBRA Qualified Beneficiaries
From: Office of State and Local Health Benefits Programs
Date: August 13, 2020
Subject: Notification of Relief and Extension of Timeframes for COBRA Program

As part of the National Emergency Relief due to the Novel Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19), a joint committee comprised of multiple Federal Agencies (the "Agencies"), has issued a Joint Notice that provides a temporary extension of certain timeframes as it relates to Extended Coverage/COBRA Beneficiaries Election Period and Premium Payments. The rule extends most COBRA deadlines to beyond the "Outbreak Period," which it defines as March 1, 2020, to 60 days after the end of the declared COVID-19 national emergency, which has not yet been announced.

The rule applies as follows:

- The COBRA Election Period: Under general COBRA provisions, eligible Qualified Beneficiaries and their eligible dependents who lose active coverage as a result of a qualifying event normally have 60 days from the date of the COBRA Election notice to make his/her continuation of coverage election. Under the new ruling, the 60-day timeframe doesn't start until the end of the "Outbreak Period". See below example.

Ex. An employee separates employment on March 31, 2020. S/he is provided the COBRA Notice and Election Form which is dated April 10th. As a Qualified Beneficiary, s/he would normally have to make an election by June 9th (60 days after the date of the notice). However in accordance with the new ruling, the Qualified Beneficiary has until 60 days after the end of the "Outbreak Period" to make his/her continuation of coverage election. The coverage would be retroactive with an effective date of April 1, 2020 per COBRA provisions.

- The COBRA Premium Payment Period: Qualified Beneficiaries normally have 45 days from the date of their COBRA election to make the first premium payment, and subsequent monthly payments must be made within a 30-day grace period that starts at the beginning of each coverage month. The new ruling extends the initial premium payment and grace period deadlines beyond the “Outbreak Period”. Therefore, the first payment and subsequent monthly payments are not due until the end of the “Outbreak Period”.

An important factor to remember with this ruling is that although the extensions apply to the COBRA election period and premium payment deadline, the Qualified Beneficiary must still make their payments timely and in full for each month in order to maintain access to active coverage. Additionally if you choose to take advantage of the extension, you will be responsible for paying all premiums, retroactively, before your coverage will be reinstated.

Please contact your respective Benefits Administrator with any questions or concerns.

Thank You,

Department of Human Resource Management,
Office of Health Benefits

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