Losing Employer Coverage: A Timeline

What the clock actually looks like when job-based coverage ends, and which decisions have hard deadlines attached.

WHO THIS IS FOR - Anyone leaving a job, being laid off, or ageing off a parent's plan

Work down the list and tick what you have confirmed. Anything left unticked is a question worth asking before you enrol.

The two clocks that start when coverage ends

Losing job-based coverage is a qualifying life event. It opens a Special Enrollment Period on the Marketplace that runs 60 days before and 60 days after the loss - so you can enrol in advance and avoid a gap, rather than waiting for coverage to lapse first.

Separately, if your employer is subject to COBRA, you generally have 60 days from the later of the coverage-loss date or the date you receive your election notice to elect continuation coverage.

These two clocks run at the same time and are independent. Electing COBRA does not close the Marketplace door immediately, but the deadlines are unforgiving once they pass. This is the part people most often lose by waiting.

Before your last day

- [ ] Confirm the exact date coverage ends - the last day worked and the last day covered are often different, frequently by the remainder of that month.
- [ ] Ask HR for the COBRA election notice and the premium amount in writing.
- [ ] Download claims history, and note your deductible and out-of-pocket accumulations for the year so far.
- [ ] Refill current prescriptions if you can.
- [ ] Schedule anything time-sensitive while you are still covered.

Within the first 60 days

- [ ] Compare COBRA against Marketplace coverage on total cost, not premium alone - COBRA usually means paying the full premium plus an administrative charge, but it keeps your exact network and your accumulated deductible.
- [ ] Apply through the Marketplace if you are going that route. You will be asked to attest to the loss of coverage and may need to provide documentation.
- [ ] Estimate your expected income for the coverage year, not last year's. Premium tax credits are based on the year you are covered.
- [ ] Check whether your household may be eligible for Medicaid or CHIP - that assessment happens through the same Marketplace application, and it has no seasonal deadline.

A note on the COBRA decision

COBRA is often more expensive than it looks, because while employed you were only seeing your share of the premium. It can still be the right answer - mid-treatment, mid-deductible, or when a specific specialist is only in that network.

The reverse is also common: someone elects COBRA reflexively, then finds a Marketplace plan with a premium tax credit costs meaningfully less. The comparison is worth doing before the election window closes, because it is much harder to unwind afterwards.

Your notes

What this checklist does not do

- COBRA applies to employers of a certain size, and some state continuation rules differ. Confirm with your employer and your state regulator.
- Timelines here are the general federal rules. Your specific notice, plan documents, and state may impose different or additional dates - the dates in your paperwork govern.
- This does not determine your eligibility for a Special Enrollment Period, a premium tax credit, Medicaid, or CHIP.
- If you are near 65, the sequencing interacts with Medicare enrolment in ways this timeline does not cover.

Official sources

Special Enrollment Periods - qualifying life events - Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services
https://www.healthcare.gov/coverage-outside-open-enrollment/special-enrollment-period/

COBRA Continuation Coverage - employee guidance - U.S. Department of Labor
https://www.dol.gov/general/topic/health-plans/cobra

HealthCare.gov - Health Insurance Marketplace - Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services
https://www.healthcare.gov/

IMPORTANT

Plan availability, pricing, and eligibility - including subsidy eligibility and medically underwritten coverage - depend on your location, household, income, and health history, and are determined by carriers and marketplaces, not by this site. Nothing here is a guarantee of coverage, acceptance, savings, or price.

This worksheet is educational. Filling it in does not apply for coverage, does not determine eligibility, and is not a quote.

QUESTIONS ABOUT YOUR OWN SITUATION

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