

Losing job-based coverage

If you lose your job-based health insurance, you have two options for health insurance coverage. You may buy an individual plan through the Marketplace. Or, you may be able to keep your health insurance for a limited time through a program called [COBRA continuation coverage](#).

- **Option 1: Get an individual Marketplace plan.** If you leave your job for any reason and/or lose your job-based coverage, you qualify for a [Special Enrollment Period](#) and can choose to buy coverage from the Marketplace outside of the regular Open Enrollment Period. You may qualify for [tax credits that can lower your monthly premiums](#) and lower out-of-pocket costs, depending on your household size and income. You'll have 60 days to enroll in the Marketplace from the time your coverage ends, which may or may not be the last day of employment. Keep any documentation you have of your current coverage and effective dates because you may need it when you request a Special Enrollment Period.

Note: This option doesn't apply if you voluntarily gave up your employer-sponsored health coverage even though you stayed in your job.

Applying for coverage through the Marketplace

You can apply for Marketplace coverage online at HealthCare.gov or by calling the Marketplace Call Center at 1-800-318-2596. TTY users should call 1-855-889-4325. When filling out the Marketplace application, you should choose "No" when answering whether you currently have health coverage. Since the 2014 Open Enrollment Period is over, you can only buy a Marketplace health plan if you qualify for a Special Enrollment Period, which includes losing job-based health insurance. You can apply for [Medicaid](#) and [Children's Health Insurance Program \(CHIP\) coverage](#) at any time.

- **Option 2: Get COBRA coverage.** When you leave a job or lose your job-based coverage, you may be able to purchase your job-based health coverage (for you and your family members) for a period, usually up to 18 months, called COBRA continuation coverage. With COBRA coverage, you usually have to pay the entire monthly premium yourself, plus a small administrative fee. Your former employer no longer pays any of your insurance costs, which means the premium is usually much higher than what you were paying before leaving your job. You also won't be able to get any of the lower costs on premiums and out-of-pocket costs that people may get using the Marketplace while you have COBRA continuation coverage. COBRA coverage may be much more expensive than coverage through the Marketplace.

You generally won't be able to get a Marketplace plan outside of the Open Enrollment Period until your COBRA coverage has ended (usually after 18 months). If you voluntarily drop your COBRA coverage or fail to pay your COBRA premiums, you won't get a Special Enrollment Period.

Important! If you currently have COBRA coverage, you can switch to a Marketplace plan between now and July 1, 2014. If interested, call the Marketplace Call Center and tell them that you're calling about your COBRA benefits. After you've been approved for a Special Enrollment Period, you can apply for and enroll in a Marketplace plan either online or by phone.

Get covered to avoid the penalty

You're required to have [minimum essential coverage](#) beginning January 1, 2014. If you don't have health coverage in 2014, you may have to pay a [fee](#) when you file your 2014 taxes in 2015. You'll also have to pay all of the costs for your health care. If you get minimum essential coverage, you won't have to pay the fee for the months of that coverage.

