

Open Enrollment FAQ

Open Enrollment (OE)

In the U.S., open enrollment season is a period of time when employees may elect or change the benefit options available through their employer, such as health, dental and life insurance, and ancillary or voluntary benefits ranging from legal services to wellness. Some benefits are fully paid by the employer, some are employee-paid through salary deferral or a section 125 cafeteria plan, and for some the cost is shared.

When do most companies have OE?

Most companies schedule OE to end a few weeks before enrollment forms must be submitted to benefit providers. For calendar-year benefit plans starting Jan. 1, OE often takes place in November.

How long does OE have to be?

OE is not required to be a certain length of time. Most employers have an OE period of 2-4 weeks.

Advanced planning for enrollment season:

- Conduct employee surveys to determine workforce healthcare and benefits preferences. Leverage survey results to make relevant changes/additions to your benefits program.
- Consider offering benefits beyond healthcare and life insurance. Some may include telemedicine, education assistance program, employee discount program, or a financial wellness platform.
- Consider offering new benefits, even if they're 100% voluntary. Many employees highly value the option to partake in voluntary benefits.
- Work proactively on plan design changes to ensure all changes are completed in advance of OE time.
- Consider leveraging an online benefits enrollment software. Benefits administration software allows your enrollment to go paperless and provides educational tips to help your employees pick the right plan for their family's needs.
- Make a list of all new changes that will enhance your benefits program and/or enrollment process. Make a plan to communicate these key highlights with your team.
- Create an enrollment communication strategy. Determine all communication channels you will use; determine what materials you need to create for OE and determine the timeline for distribution.

Ensure your employees receive all the necessary communication materials:

- OE schedule
- Statement of current coverage
- Plan-specific changes, rates, and summaries
- OE guide and forms
- Deadline for OE
- Contact information

Plan Design Issues:

- Confirm your plan's out of pocket maximum complies with the ACA's limits for the applicable year.
- For HDHPs (high deductible health plans), confirm that the plan's deductible and out-of-pocket maximum comply with the current year or renewal year.
- Communicate any plan design changes to employees as part of the OE process.

When in doubt, ensure key pieces of information are communicated to your team during OE time:

- Enrollment deadlines
- Healthcare provider information
- Where/how to enroll
- Changes from the previous year

Open Enrollment Checklist:

- ☐ Determine health plan(s) to be offered

- ☐ Determine employer contribution schedule for health, dental, vision, life insurance, HSA, etc. as applicable
- ☐ Obtain any necessary board approvals
- ☐ Complete the Pre-Enrollment Form and return it to your Benefits Advisor
- ☐ Schedule enrollment meetings internally and with your Benefits Advisor
- ☐ Make sure you have received new enrollments, including qualifying life events
- ☐ Distribute employee benefits announcements, materials and notices
- ☐ Determine how enrollment is collected (online member self-service, HR entry online or paper)

Enrollment and Legal Disclosure Requirements

Required Benefit Notices - Notice of Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) Special Enrollment Rights, Medicare Part D Notice, Women's Health and Cancer Rights Act (WHCRA) Notice, Grandfathered Plan Notice, HIPAA Privacy Notice, HIPAA Wellness Program Notice, Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) Wellness Program Notice, Michelle's Law Notice, Notice of Patient Protections, Notice of Privacy Practices, Employer Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP) Notice, Genetic Information Nondiscrimination Act (GINA) Disclosures, ACA Section 1557 Nondiscrimination Notice & Taglines, Uniformed Services Employment & Reemployment Rights Act (USERRA)

Summary of Benefits and Coverage - Must provide at initial enrollment and annually with OE materials.

Coordination of Benefits - Must be made available to employees annually. Included in the Certificate of Coverage, which is provided to you each year following your renewal.

COBRA Notices - Includes initial notice, QLE notice (required of employee, not employer), unavailability notice, early termination notice, & election notice. Only required for groups with 20+ employees.

Plan Document and Disclosure Requirements

Summary Plan Description (SPD) & Plan Documents - Must be provided to new participants within 90 days of being covered under the plan. Updated SPD (or Summary of Material Modification) must be provided to participants no later than 210 days after the end of the plan year in which the change is adopted. If the modification results in a material reduction in covered services or benefits, it must be provided within 60 days of the adoption of the modified reduction.

Form 5500 and Summary Annual Report (SAR) - Due 7 months after your plan year begins. Must distribute to all participants. Example: Plan begins January 1 = July 31 Due Date

Plan Documents and Legal Disclosure Requirements - Included in ERISA SPD Wrap Documents

Conversion Notice - Must provide to qualified beneficiaries where the plan provides a conversion option.

DOL Claim Procedures - Must disclose & comply with claims, appeals, & external review of requirements.

Medical Loss Ratio Rebates - Provides notice on how, in the event a rebate is received, the rebate will be distributed.

Qualified Medical Child Support Order (QMCSO) - Must provide notice of receipt of a proposed order and of determination regarding the order.

Subrogation - Must provide notice of employer's rights of reimbursements.

IRS Requirements

Section 125 or Cafeteria Plan - Must have document on file for IRS. Should be updated to include spousal open enrollment as a QLE.

Retirement Plan Notices and Disclosures

Safe Harbor Notice - 30-90 days before the start of the next plan year

Automatic Contribution Arrangement Notice - At least 30 days before the start of the next plan year

Plan and Investment Fee Disclosure - At least Annual