



PEEHIP

Quarterly



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PUBLIC EDUCATION EMPLOYEES' HEALTH INSURANCE PLAN

September 2008

Open Enrollment Deadlines

Open Enrollment began July 1, 2008, and will end by the following deadlines:

- ◆ **The deadline for submitting paper Open Enrollment forms is August 31, 2008.** Any paper forms postmarked after August 31, 2008, will not be accepted.
- ◆ **The deadline for submitting online Open Enrollment changes is midnight of September 10, 2008.** After September 10, 2008, online Open Enrollment changes will not be accepted, and the Open Enrollment link will be closed.
- ◆ **The deadline for enrolling or re-enrolling in a Flexible Spending Account online or on paper is September 30, 2008.**

All Open Enrollment changes will be effective October 1, 2008.

Use the New Member Online Services To Make Your Open Enrollment Changes

If you have not done so already, you still have time to make your Open Enrollment changes through the PEEHIP **Member Online Services**. PEEHIP members can access the Member Online Services by going to the RSA Web site at www.rsa-al.gov and clicking the Member Online Services link on the left side of the Home page. All you need is a User ID and a Password to access the online system. If you do not have these, registering online is easy! Just click the "Register Now" button from the Member Login page and follow the onscreen instructions to create your own User ID and Password. Once you log in, click the "Enroll in or Change PEEHIP Coverages" link from the Home page. Now you are ready to begin making your Open Enrollment elections online!

Active and retired members can view, change and/or enroll in health insurance coverage and the Optional Coverage Plans (cancer, dental, indemnity, and vision); and **active members** can also enroll or re-enroll in the Flexible Spending Accounts. Using the online system is fast, free, secure and accurate! Close to 5,000 members have submitted their Open Enrollment changes through the new online system since July 1, 2008.

Did you know...

- ◆ **The online system is operated in Real Time?** By the time you receive a Confirmation page, your Open Enrollment elections are already processed in our system!

- ◆ **The online system is customized for each member?** The system presents you with only the options that are applicable to you, saving you time and eliminating the possibility of incorrectly completing the form.
- ◆ **You can enroll in new coverages and cancel current coverages all in one easy integrated process?** This means you do not have to complete separate forms to enroll in new coverages and cancel current coverages.
- ◆ **When you make your Open Enrollment elections online, the online system provides a premium calculation so that you will know what your monthly out-of-pocket premium will be?** You get a detailed breakdown of the premium calculation by the type of coverages for which you are enrolled.
- ◆ **You even get a Confirmation page confirming that you successfully submitted your Open Enrollment changes to PEEHIP?** Your Confirmation page provides you with a date and time stamp of when your changes were successfully submitted, as well as a copy of your current coverages as of October 1, 2008. A printer friendly version is available to print a copy for your records.

All Open Enrollment elections made online will have an **effective date of October 1, 2008**. Hurry and make your Open Enrollment changes online if you have not done so already! The online Open Enrollment link will be available until midnight September 10, 2008.

Open Enrollment Common Errors

PEEHIP has processed thousands of Open Enrollment forms since July 1 and several problems have come to our attention. Please review these issues and make sure you have properly submitted your Open Enrollment changes and/or elections.

Common Errors When Using Paper Forms:

- ◆ **Enrolling in new coverage** and not completing the proper form. These members are using the HEALTH INSURANCE AND OPTIONAL STATUS CHANGE form rather than the HEALTH INSURANCE AND OPTIONAL ENROLLMENT APPLICATION. For example, if you do not have dental coverage but are enrolled in the PEEHIP Hospital Medical Coverage, please complete the enrollment application if you wish to enroll in the dental coverage.
- ◆ **Cancelling existing coverage** and not completing the proper form. These members are using the HEALTH INSURANCE AND OPTIONAL ENROLLMENT APPLICATION rather than the HEALTH INSURANCE AND OPTIONAL STATUS CHANGE form.
- ◆ Some members who are currently enrolled in the four Optional Coverage Plans and enrolling in the PEEHIP Hospital Medical Plan are submitting the enrollment application but failing to let us know that they want to cancel one or more of the four Optional Coverage Plans.
- ◆ Some members are enrolling in new coverage but are not completing a form or notifying PEEHIP to drop existing coverage. PEEHIP cannot cancel any insurance plans without a written notification requesting the cancellation of insurance plans. PEEHIP cannot ASSUME cancellation of insurance plans.
- ◆ Adding family coverage and failing to properly complete the dependent information, especially the Social Security numbers of the dependents.
- ◆ Failing to send in the required documentation when adding certain dependents, such as marriage certificate when adding a new spouse; birth certificate when adding a biological child that has a different last name; Social Security cards for name changes.
- ◆ Faxing a copy of the form to PEEHIP and then mailing the form to PEEHIP. Do NOT do both! Your Open Enrollment elections will not get processed any faster by faxing the form then mailing it. On the contrary, the duplication slows the process down because it causes valuable time to be wasted by our limited staff of employees who process the paper returns manually. The fastest, most accurate and least costly way to get your Open Enrollment elections processed is to file them using the new online system. By the time you get your online Confirmation page, your changes are already processed and in our system!

Common Errors When Using the Online System:

- ◆ Adding coverage for **newborns** through the online system which will give an effective date of October 1, 2008. At this time, members who want the effective date of coverage to be the newborn's date of birth must add the newborn to their coverage using a paper form.
- ◆ Adding coverage for a **new spouse** through the online system which will give an effective date of October 1, 2008. At this time, members who want the effective date of coverage to be the date of marriage must add the new spouse to their coverage using a paper form.
- ◆ **New employees** enrolling in coverage through the online system which will give an effective date of October 1, 2008. New employees enrolling in PEEHIP coverages who want their effective date of coverage to be their date of hire or September 1, 2008, can enroll in coverage using a paper form. **NOTE: It is anticipated that by the time this newsletter is printed the "New Employee" feature of the online system will be available which will allow a new employee to choose their effective date of coverage which can be: 1) their date of hire, 2) the first day of the month following their date of hire, or 3) October 1, 2008.**

Open Enrollment News

The 2008-2009 Open Enrollment Packets were mailed to all PEEHIP eligible active and retired members the first week of July. If you do not need to make changes to your PEEHIP coverage, do NOT send in an Open Enrollment form. You will automatically remain enrolled in the same or existing plan(s), and your monthly premium will continue to be deducted from your check. However, you are required to re-enroll in the PEEHIP Flexible Spending Accounts, Federal Poverty Level Assistance Program and Children's Health Insurance Program each year if you wish to participate in any of these plans.

Members enrolling in new insurance plans should receive their new ID cards no later than the last week in September for October 1 coverage. PEEHIP strongly encourages all members covered by PEEHIP insurance to review their paycheck stub each month to ensure the proper amount has been deducted for their PEEHIP premiums. The new payroll deduction for PEEHIP members who made changes to their insurance coverage during the Open Enrollment period will be reflected in their September check. Active members electing to enroll in the Flexible Spending Accounts (Flex) will have their first Flex contribution amount deducted from their October paycheck.

Preparing for your Doctor's Appointment

A Pharmacist's Perspective

The time you spend with your physician is valuable to your health and well being so be prepared and take an active role in your health care. Here are some suggestions to help you prepare for your next appointment.

Before you go to the doctor:

- ◆ Make a list of all medications you are currently taking to give to your doctor. (Computers in today's pharmacies make it easy to request a printout of all your medications from your pharmacist.)
- ◆ Your list should include drugs, prescription and non-prescription, vitamins and any natural products such as herbal supplements. More and more drugs that used to be available only by prescription are now available over the counter and a complete list will prevent duplication.
- ◆ Bring a copy of the PEEHIP Formulary Drug List to your doctor's visit. This list will assist your doctor in prescribing the most effective and lowest cost medications to treat conditions requiring medication. This list can be found at www.rsa-al.gov\PEEHIP\pharm-benefits.html.

At the doctor's office/clinic:

- ◆ Answer all your doctor's questions. Be honest about your day to day lifestyle (diet, exercise, smoking, and alcohol intake). Don't leave anything out because you are embarrassed or afraid; your doctor and nurse have heard it before and information you share during your visit is important to your treatment.
- ◆ Describe any allergies to medications, foods, or other things. Also provide your doctor with your family's health history.
- ◆ Tell your doctor or nurse if you are being treated by other doctors. This will help ensure there is a continuity of care among health care professionals.
- ◆ Ask questions about your treatment. If you are going to take a new medication, ask how and when you should take it.
- ◆ Ask questions if you do not understand what your doctor is communicating. If you are not certain what your doctor or nurse is asking and/or instructing you to do or why, ask them to write it down and/or explain it again or differently. Sometimes it is helpful to bring a friend or relative to your visit to help.
- ◆ Refills - Check your medications and make sure they have refills; this will save you and your doctor time in the future.

Remember you and your doctor along with your pharmacist are a team. Working together and following directions are crucial and will help you achieve a more positive health outcome. Take a proactive role in your health so you can enjoy a greater quality of life.

Flexible Spending Accounts Can Save You Money

Active employees may enroll in a **Health Care Spending Account** or a **Dependent Care Spending Account** and use **pre-tax** payroll deductions to set aside cash for many health care and dependent care expenses. Money set aside in your Flexible Spending Accounts will reduce your taxes by reducing your taxable income, providing you and your family more value for your dollar. You pay less in federal, state, local and Social Security taxes. Using these pre-tax accounts can make a significant difference in your take-home pay!

The Flex accounts are administered by Blue Cross. Once you enroll, you will receive a welcome letter from Blue Cross with information about your account. The money you pay out-of-pocket for the health care and dependent care expenses is reimbursed to you from your accounts. You will need to file a [Request for Reimbursement](#) form in order to be reimbursed, and this form can be downloaded from the Blue Cross Web site at www.bcbsal.org/plans/preferred/fsa/forms.cfm. Blue Cross will process these requests daily. You may even elect to have your reimbursements deposited directly into your checking or savings account. File your reimbursement requests to: BCBS of Alabama, Benefits Services Center, P. O. Box 11586, Birmingham, AL 35202-1586, or fax to 205-220-7991 or toll free fax 877-889-3610. If you have any questions about the Flexible Spending Accounts, you can **call Blue Cross toll free at 800-213-7930**.

During the Open Enrollment period, you can easily and quickly set up a Flexible Spending Account through the Member Online Services system at www.rsa-al.gov. You can also enroll using the paper Flexible Spending Account Enrollment Application found in the back of your Open Enrollment packet. The deadline for enrolling or re-enrolling in the Flex program is **September 30, 2008**. You must re-enroll in the Flex program each year as re-enrollment is not automatic.

Generic Drugs: How are They Approved for the U.S. Market?

Generic medications are safe, effective, affordable alternatives to brand-name medications. The U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) states that a generic drug is identical to a brand-name drug in dosage form, safety, strength, route of administration, quality, performance, and intended use. Essentially, generic drugs are copies of brand-name drugs with the same active ingredients. Both brand-name medications and their generic equivalents are reviewed and approved by the FDA's Center for Drug Evaluation and Research (CDER).

How does the approval of a generic medication differ from the brand-name medication? The approval process for a generic medication differs from that of a brand-name medication in one key area. Makers of brand-name medications conduct the original studies which prove that a medication is safe and effective in humans for its intended use. Therefore, generic manufacturers generally do not have to conduct studies to establish safety and effectiveness since the active ingredient has already been proven safe and effective. While this might not seem fair, brand-name drugs are given exclusive rights for a number of years to recoup the cost of research and development.

Did you know?

- ◆ Brand-name firms account for an estimated 50 percent of generic drug production. They frequently make copies of their own or other brand-name drugs but sell them without the brand-name.
- ◆ Generic drug applications undergo a rigorous review by FDA before they can be approved.
- ◆ Generic drugs are of the same quality as, and are equivalent in safety and effectiveness to, their brand-name counterparts.
- ◆ Makers of generic drugs are not required to repeat the extensive clinical trials that have already been used in the development of the original drug, but they must scientifically demonstrate that their product is bioequivalent (how the drug reacts in the body). This means that it performs in the same way as the brand-name drug.
- ◆ A generic drug must also be the same dosage, and have the same route of administration and conditions of use, as its brand-name drug.
- ◆ A company that markets a generic drug must show that the product delivers the same amount of its active ingredient, over the same amount of time, as the brand-name product.
- ◆ Generic products are used in more than 50% of all prescription drug purchases in the United States.

More information about generic drugs can be found on the FDA's Web site: http://www.fda.gov/cder/consumerinfo/generics_q&a.htm

We are Moving!

From September 24-26, the RSA will be relocating to its new headquarters across the street. During this time, our ability to receive phone calls, emails and visitors will be limited. Please only contact us in case of an emergency during these three days. We will return to full staff on Monday, September 29. Thanks in advance for your patience.

Even though we will be moving, our mailing address will remain the same:

**Retirement Systems of Alabama
P. O. Box 302150
Montgomery AL 36130-2150**

What will be changing is our physical address, phone numbers, and email addresses. If you happen to use the old phone numbers or email addresses, you will be redirected to the new ones. The Web address changed in June.

Office location: **201 South Union Street**
Phone numbers: **334-517-7000 or 877-517-0020**
Fax numbers: **334-517-7001 or 877-517-0021**
Email addresses: **firstname.lastname@rsa-al.gov**
Web Address: **www.rsa-al.gov**

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