

FAQ's: Benefits and Unpaid Leave of Absence

UAMS Human Resources
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If I run out of paid leave time and my department approves a leave of absence for me, what happens to my benefits?

You will need to contact Human Resources to talk about your specific situation. Unless you fill out drop forms before you leave, we will assume you wish to continue your insurance coverage during your leave of absence. Two things we will need to know:

(1) How many paychecks do you expect to miss? If you miss just one check, no action on your part is needed. Your back premiums will collect in arrears and will be deducted all at once when you receive your next paycheck. **But if you are going to miss more than one paycheck, you must pay your premiums directly to our office during your leave in order to keep your insurance coverage.**

(2) What is the reason for your leave of absence? We need to know if you are on military leave, Family Medical Leave, workers' comp leave, personal leave, etc., so we can advise you of your specific benefit continuation rights. You may need to apply for paid Short Term Disability if you're going to be out longer than 2 weeks for a serious illness or maternity, or for Long Term Disability benefits if you anticipate being off work for 6 or more months.

Can I drop my insurance while I'm off the payroll and then pick it back up when I return?

Probably not. Beginning an unpaid leave of absence is a "qualifying event" to drop your coverage. You have 31 days to fill out drop forms. Be cautious, though. You may not be able to re-enroll when you return to work.

Scenario #1: If the entire time you are gone is covered by the Family Medical Leave Act (FMLA), the answer is "Yes, you can re-enroll." Please remember that you can be on FMLA leave for a maximum of 12 weeks, and your supervisor is the one who designates your absence as being covered under FMLA. This 12-week period starts the moment you are off work, even if you have sick or vacation leave to cover the first part of your absence. If you would like more information about FMLA leave, please talk to your supervisor or ask for an FMLA information sheet from Human Resources.

Scenario #2: If you are returning from military or workers' comp leave, the answer is also "Yes, you can re-enroll." If you are on military leave, please ask for the "What Happens to My Benefits When I Go on Military Leave?" information sheet.

Scenario #3: If your leave of absence is NOT covered under FMLA, military or workers' comp, the answer is "No, you cannot re-enroll." You would have to wait for the University to offer open enrollment. Annual open enrollment is not guaranteed. Or you could enroll if you experience a qualifying event such as marriage, divorce or birth of a child.

How do I pay my premiums if I'm going to miss more than one paycheck?

If you are going to miss more than one paycheck, you will need to pay your premiums to keep your insurance coverage. You can pay by personal check made payable to "UAMS", by credit card or by money order. Please mail payment to:

Benefits LOA payments, # 564
UAMS Human Resources
4301 W. Markham
Little Rock, AR 72205

It is critical you contact us when you return to work so we can make timely adjustments to your premiums in our payroll system. Otherwise, your first paycheck back may not reflect the premium payments you made while you were gone.

What part of my insurance premium costs do I pay?

While you are on an approved leave of absence for FMLA, military, or workers comp reasons, your department will continue to pay its portion of your insurance premium. You are responsible for paying the portion that would normally be deducted from your paycheck.

If you are on leave for other personal reasons or are on medical leave not covered by FMLA, you are responsible for paying the entire premium, including the portion UAMS usually pays.

What are the qualifying events that allow me to change my coverage?

You have 31 days to make changes to your insurance when you experience a “qualified status change.” This includes gaining a dependent by marriage, birth or adoption. It also applies if you lose a dependent through divorce or death. You may also have a 31-day enrollment window if your spouse loses their coverage due to loss of job, unpaid leave of absence or change to part-time status. We will need documentation of these events for the change to be processed.

How does my no-pay status affect my Flexible Spending Account?

Are you currently enrolled in an FSA? If so and you return to work in the same calendar year, your FSA deduction amount will automatically increase so you will reach your elected annual amount by the end of the calendar year. You may also be eligible to make changes to your FSA before you leave. Be sure to talk to us before you go on leave so we can discuss the options with you.

If you are NOT currently enrolled in an FSA, you may be eligible to sign up. See the table below of allowable events. **You have a 31-day window following these events to make changes OR to enroll.** Note that the list is shorter for a Health Care FSA. For example, the IRS does not allow you to change your Health Care FSA election based on your leave of absence, but you can change your Dependent Care FSA.

| | Dependent Care FSA (daycare expenses) | Health Care FSA (medical expenses) |
|--|--|---------------------------------------|
| Marriage | X | X |
| Divorce | X | X |
| Death of spouse or dependent | X | X |
| Birth or adoption | X | X |
| Spouse commences or terminates employment | X | |
| Employee or spouse work status changes from full-time to part-time or vice versa | X | |
| Employee or spouse commences or returns from unpaid leave of absence | X | |

What happens if I do not come back to work following an unpaid leave of absence?

If you do not return to work, your insurance will terminate retroactively to coincide with your last payment. If you did not pay premiums while you were on leave of absence, you are personally responsible for paying any medical or dental expenses you incurred, and you might not be eligible for COBRA coverage. Please contact us as soon as you begin your leave of absence so we can discuss your options.

Who do I call if I have questions?

Contact Human Resources at (501) 686-5650. Be sure to contact us at the start of your leave of absence, then again when you return to work.

NOTE: *The above information may not apply to HeadStart employees who are on summer break. A separate letter will be sent to HeadStart employees each year to explain their benefit options.*