

LEGAL EASE



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Be sure to sign up for Medicare even if you plan to keep working

There was a time not so long ago that, for most people, eligibility for Medicare and Social Security were simultaneous, that is, age 65 years. However, for those who reach their 65th birthday in 2010, “full retirement” age is no longer 65 but is 66 years old. Furthermore, many workers are choosing to work longer than the deemed Social Security retirement age. However, despite the changes in Social Security regulations, eligibility for Medicare remains at age 65. The Social Security Administration (SSA) has launched a new service that allows new Medicare beneficiaries who are not also applying for Social Security benefits to apply online.

Even if you plan to continue working once you are 65 years old, you can and should sign up for Medicare benefits within 4 months of your 65th birthday. Medicare is this nation’s health insurance for those who are 65 and older. Although Medicare does not cover all medical expenses, or most long term care expenses, once you reach age 65, it will be your primary insurance, and your employer sponsored coverage (or spouse’s employer’s coverage) can be a supplement or “Medigap” insurance.

Failure to apply for Medicare can result in financial penalties. For instance, Medicare Part B, which pays for doctor visits and other medical outpatient services, requires a monthly premium to be paid. If you choose not to sign up for Part B at age 65 years, the start date for your benefits might be delayed, and a higher monthly premium can be charged, unless you meet the requirements for the “special enrollment period (SEP).” Information on how the SEP works is available on the Social Security Administration website or at www.medicare.gov.

The first step is to go to www.socialsecurity.gov/medicareonly/. This page will give you the information to get started in the process. It is possible to use the online application (which SSA says takes 10 minutes to complete) if you are at least 64 years and 8 months old, do not currently have any Medicare coverage, live in the United States or one of its territories, and do not want to start receiving Social Security benefits at this time. It is suggested that if you have a Health Savings Account (HSA) and/or health insurance based upon employment, you should talk with your insurance company or employer’s personnel office to as to how signing up for Medicare will affect you. There is also valuable information about delaying retirement benefits, and how it will affect you before considering to apply for Medicare only. Do not miss the 60 second video by the “Patty Duke Show” cast to learn more about applying online for Medicare.

Joe Baker, president of the Medicare Rights Center, is quoted in Elder Law Answers (www.elderlawanswers.com) saying, “This new online Medicare application will make it easier for more people to enroll in Medicare. It saves them at trip to the Social Security office, and they can complete the application at home, at their own pace.” For busy working people, not yet ready to retire at age 65, this seems like a great option to be sure that they are receiving all of the benefits to which they are entitled.