



Health WATCH

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**"It's not your blue
blood, your pedigree or
your college degree.
It's what you do with
your life that counts."**

**—Millard Fuller,
founder and president of
Habitat for Humanity
International**

No Changes for 2005

On August 18, the State Employees' Insurance Board voted to accept the legislature-approved funding level for the State Employees' Health Insurance Plan. There are no changes in the employee or retiree premium share or in benefits. Premiums will be subject to revision if the legislature makes committee recommended changes during the expected special session.

In April, Governor Riley appointed an 11-member commission to address the skyrocketing cost of health insurance for State and public education employees.

Recommendations by the committee will be submitted to the Governor and legislature for their consideration.

TRICARE Supplement Available

Effective January 1, 2005, the State Employees' Insurance Board will begin offering a TRICARE Supplement Program to TRICARE eligible employees and their families as a health insurance option.

What is TRICARE?

TRICARE is the health insurance plan provided by the Department of Defense to military personnel and their families.

Who is eligible to enroll in the TRICARE Supplement?

Eligible employees must not be eligible for Medicare and must be registered with the Defense Enrollment Eligibility Reporting System (DEERS). They include employees who are:

- Military retirees.
- Spouses, surviving spouses or some former spouses of a military retiree
- Spouses of active duty military personnel
- Retired reservists and Guardsmen (between the ages of 60 and 65 with at least 20 creditable years of military service)

These employees may enroll their spouses under age 65 and unmarried dependent children under age 21 or 23, if a full-time student. These family members must also be registered with DEERS.

What is the TRICARE Supplement plan?

The TRICARE Supplement Program works like Medicare to provide secondary benefits. The supplement plan pays the portion the employee is responsible for, such as the TRICARE fiscal year outpatient deductible of \$150 for an individual and \$300 for a family, the 20%/25% TRICARE Standard/Extra cost share, and the excess charges for the difference between TRICARE's allowed amounts and the provider's billed amounts when non-participating providers are utilized.

Want more information on the TRICARE Supplement plan?

Contact Janice Foreman of the State Employees' Insurance Board at (334) 833-5912 or visit the SEIB website at www.seib.state.al.us.

NEED A RAISE?

Ok, dumb question - don't we all need a raise? Well, what's stopping you? Give yourself that raise.

Do you have at least \$360.00 in out-of-pocket medical expense per year? Now think. Chances are that you and your family do. What do you pay in copays, deductibles, dental expense, glasses and contacts? Don't forget to count what you spend for over-the-counter medication. What about the eye laser surgery? Have you been wanting this procedure but just can't afford it?

Do you pay for childcare inside or outside your home? If you have children in daycare, without a doubt you are paying more than \$360.00 a year.

If you answered "yes" to one or both of the questions, pat yourself on the back! You are on your way to giving yourself a raise in 2005. The State Employee's Flexible Benefits Plan can make that possible. These plans literally put money in your pocket instead of Uncle Sam's.

It works like this: if you or your family members has at least \$360 to \$5,000 in out-of-pocket medical expense per year you should enroll in the Health Care Reimbursement Account (HCRA). Even if your family members are not dependents on your BCBS health plan you can be reimbursed for their out-of-pocket expenses. If you have childcare expenses that you pay (from \$360 to \$5,000 per year), the Dependent Care Reimbursement Account (DCRA) would benefit you. You contribute money, before taxes, from 24 pay periods during 2005. You must decide, based on your expenses, how much you want to contribute during the plan year. This money comes back to you as you incur out-of-pocket medical expenses or when you pay for childcare. The money that you receive has not been taxed and will never be taxed.

In addition, the HCRA works like an "interest free loan: on those larger medical expenditures, such as dental work, eye glasses and eye laser surgery. For example,

you are anticipating \$1,000 worth of dental work in 2005 above what your health plan covers. You would enroll in the HCRA, agreeing to put \$1,000, before taxes, into this account over the period of a year. It totals about \$41.66, taken from 24 pay checks during the upcoming year - before taxes. When you have the dental work done - whether or not you have contributed the entire amount into the HCRA yet - you will receive \$1,000 once the claim is filed. This \$1,000 has not been taxed and will never be taxed.

Enrollment forms and Flexible Benefit information will be sent to all State employees the first of November. You may also enroll online at www.seib.state.al.us/flex.htm If you have any questions, please see our video presentation on-line or you may call our toll-free number at 1-800-513-1384.

***Congratulations
on your upcoming
raise!***

Flu Shot Schedule

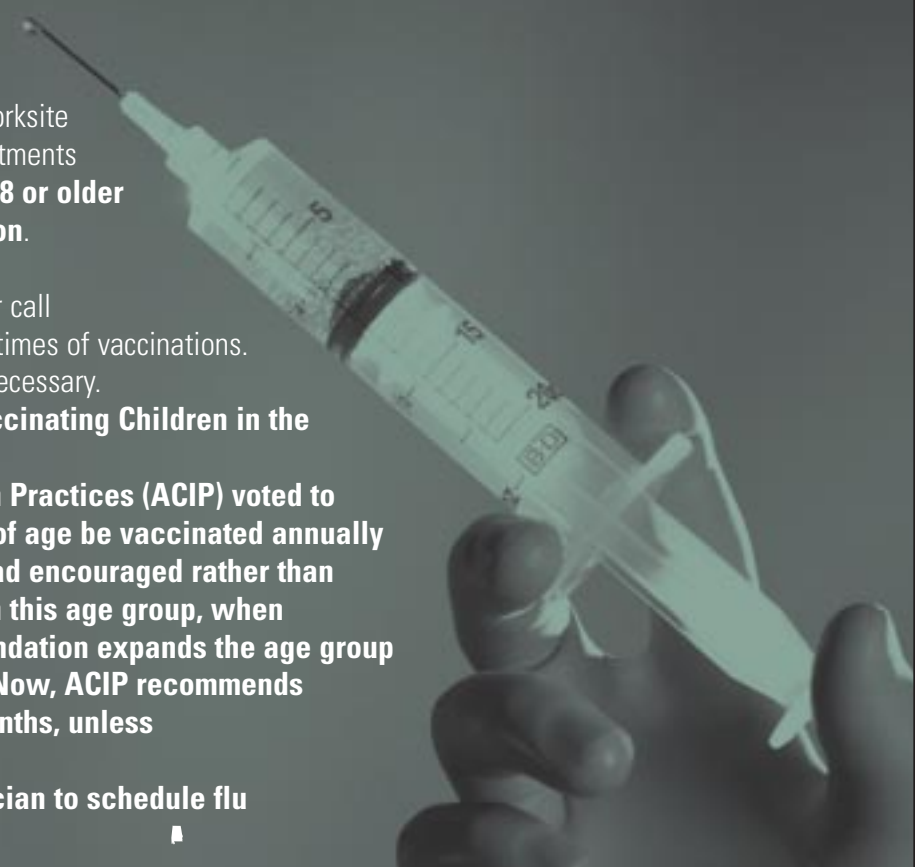
Free flu shots will be available again this year to all State employees and their covered adult dependents through the Worksite Wellness program or at the local health departments throughout Alabama. **Dependents must be 18 or older to participate in the worksite immunization.**

After September 30, go to: www.seib.state.al.us/2K2/seip/wwwp.asp or call your local health department for dates and times of vaccinations. Updates to schedules will be made daily as necessary.

ACIP Expands Recommendation for Vaccinating Children in the 2004-05 Flu Season

The Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP) voted to recommend that children 6 to 23 months of age be vaccinated annually against influenza. Previously, the ACIP had encouraged rather than recommended vaccination for children in this age group, when vaccination was feasible. This recommendation expands the age group for which vaccination is recommended. Now, ACIP recommends vaccination for all children aged 6-23 months, unless contraindications are present.

Please remember to talk to your pediatrician to schedule flu shots for your children.



Task Force Completes Its Study

In April, Governor Riley appointed a 14-member commission to address the skyrocketing cost of health insurance for State and public education employees. The panel is comprised of legislators, public employees and business leaders. This commission recently made unanimous recommendations that could cut state health insurance costs by as much as \$50 million next year, and \$300 million over five years.

Task force recommendations include charging higher premiums for smokers, encouraging employees to seek coverage under a spouse's health insurance plan and discourages employees from retiring early and relying on the State for their health coverage. Dr. David Bronner said that the idea behind this recommendation is similar to what is used by the Retirement Systems, the more years you work, the better your retirement benefits.

Members of the commission expressed their optimism at the projected savings to the State of Alabama and their gratitude for the commitment and cohesiveness of the panel. Praise was also bestowed on the two State plans and their boards.

"I think I can say now, with no reservation, that I don't think anybody - any private employer, any public employer - does a better job ... it should be recognized that the problems that are facing the State were not created by these boards but they are inherent in health care. By any measure I think they are much better off and, really by my judgment, they're doing a better job than any private or public sector employer."

- John McMahon,
Commission Chairman

"These recommendations are a very promising first step."

- Toby Roth,
Governor Riley's Chief of Staff

"...the reason each of these plans continuously run 20% below the Southeastern average is primarily due to the exceptional management of both plans. The work of this task force speaks well for the State of Alabama that such a diverse group can come together and reach an agreement that will continue to

move this state in the right direction."

- David Bronner,
CEO of Retirement Systems of Alabama
and commission member

"...will need to do more work in the future to control escalating health care costs. We all realize this is not the end, but the beginning."

- William Canary,
president of the Business
Council of Alabama

For more information on the
commission recommendations, visit our
website: www.seib.state.al.us



This Fall I Will....

Evaluate my health insurance coverage.

- Are my eligible dependents listed?
- Have student verifications returned to the SEIB?
- Is my dependent premium being deducted **before** taxes, saving me lots of money?

Realize the savings of a Flex membership.

- Estimate my out-of-pocket medical, dental and prescriptions expenses this year.
- Calculate my costs to caretakers for my children or other family members?
- Make a list of anticipated additional expenses (such as children's braces) in 2005.
- Elect **before** November 30 to have these expenses paid with tax free dollars.

Take care of myself first.

- Sign up for my annual Wellness screening at work.
- Have a quarterly blood pressure checked through the Worksite Wellness program.
- Get my flu shot - at work, of course.
- Mark my calendar for the "Great American Smoke Out" on November 18 this year because I now know that:
 - **smoking kills** about 440,000 smokers every year in the U.S.
 - **6.4 million children alive today** will be killed by their future smoking addiction.
 - **every pack of cigarettes** smoked costs Americans about \$7 in excess medical costs and lost productivity, which translates to about \$3,391 per year per smoker.
 - **men who smoke** lose an average of 13.2 years of life. Women who smoke lose about 14.5 years of life.
 - **states spent** about \$868 million in 2003 for tobacco control efforts. The tobacco industry spent about \$8.4 billion in 2003 to promote its products.

... and I will be healthier - physically and financially - in 2005!



November is Open Enrollment

November is Open Enrollment time! During this month you may change your dependent coverage without the usual 270-day waiting period on preexisting conditions. You **must** specify a January 1 effective date of coverage on your change form and return to the SEIB by **November 30**. Change forms may be obtained from your payroll/personnel officer or by download at: www.seib.state.al.us.

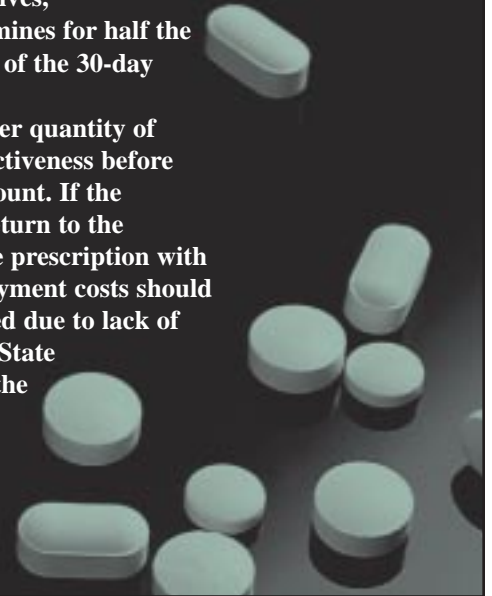
And while you're evaluating your health insurance coverage, check with your payroll officer to make certain that your dependent coverage premiums are being paid with your pre-tax dollars. You will save money in 2005. For more information on the Flexible Employee Benefits Plan, visit our website at www.seib.state.al.us

Don't Forget About the Half-Month Prescription Purchase Program!

The next time you visit your pharmacy, ask your druggist if your new prescription can be filled under the "Half-Month Prescription Purchase Program." This voluntary program will allow you to purchase a fifteen-day supply of initial brand name prescriptions in certain categories. Allowed drugs include, but are not limited to anti-hypertensives, gastrointestinals, and non-sedating antihistamines for half the copayment of \$10.00 of a Tier 2 drug instead of the 30-day supply and a \$20 copayment.

You can save money by purchasing a smaller quantity of a prescription and evaluating the drug's effectiveness before purchasing the balance of the prescribed amount. If the desired results are achieved, you may then return to the pharmacy and purchase the remainder of the prescription with another \$10.00 copayment. You save on copayment costs should the initial 15-days' medication be discontinued due to lack of effectiveness, unwanted side effects, etc. The State Employees' Health Plan saves on the cost of the medication not purchased.

For more information, talk with your pharmacist or log onto the Blue Cross Blue Shield of Alabama website at: www.bcbsal.org



Health Observance Calendar provided by Hope Health, Inc

MONTH	HEALTH FOCUS	CONTACT SITES
OCTOBER	Child Health Month	Administration for Children and Families, US Department of Health and Human Services -- www.acf.dhhs.gov
	Breast Cancer Awareness Month	National Alliance of Breast Cancer Organizations -- www.nabco.org
	Dental Hygiene Month	American Dental Association -- www.ada.org
	Family Sexuality Education Month	Sexuality Information and Education Council of the United States -- www.siecus.org
	Liver Awareness Month	American Liver Foundation -- www.liverfoundation.org
	Hepatitis Awareness Month	Hepatitis Foundation International -- www.hepfi.org
	Lupus Awareness Month	Lupus Foundation of America -- www.lupus.org
	Spina Bifida Prevention Month	March of Dimes Birth Defects Foundation -- www.modimes.org
	Sudden Infant Death Syndrome Awareness Month	American Sudden Infant Death Syndrome Institute -- www.sids.org
NOVEMBER	Child Safety and Protection Month	Children's Safety Network National Injury and Violence Prevention Resource Center -- www.edc.org/HHD/csn/
	Alzheimer's Awareness Month	Alzheimer's Disease Education and Referral Center, National Institute on Aging -- www.alzheimers.org
	Diabetes Month/ Diabetes Education Week	American Diabetes Association -- www.diabetes.org
	Epilepsy Month	Epilepsy Foundation of America -- www.efa.org
	Great American Smokeout	Office on Smoking and Health, National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion, CDC www.cdc.gov/nccdphp/osh/mission.htm and www.cdc.gov/nccdphp/osh/tobacco.htm