



# Memo

TO: Jackson County Board of Commissioners

FROM: Kathleen Breedlove, Human Resources Director

DATE: June 16, 2020

SUBJECT: Health Insurance Policy for Users of Tobacco Products

The attached **Health Insurance Policy for Users of Tobacco Products** was approved by the Jackson County Board of Commissioners on April 16, 2019. This policy requires health plan eligible employees of any age and retirees under age 65 to certify their status as a user or non-user or tobacco products at the time they begin health plan eligible employment, annually during the Open Enrollment period, and also submit to mandatory substance testing.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic situation, an administrative decision was made to temporarily suspend the mandatory substance testing requirement during our recent Open Enrollment in May 2020. The Director of the Jackson County Department of Public Health recommends suspension of testing through at least April 2021.

Jackson County as an employer and provider of employee health insurance benefits, discourages the use of tobacco products in any form and is seriously committed to assisting tobacco products users with cessation support. For the upcoming year previously identified tobacco users will be encouraged to contact the Health Department for cessation assistance and education.

The County Manager is given administrative authorization as is necessary to implement this policy and ensure compliance. It is recommended the Jackson County Board of Commissioners approve a suspension of this policy until Administration and the Health Department Director determine when it will once again be safe to resume mandatory tobacco swab testing as outlined in the policy.

Attachments: Health Insurance Policy for Users of Tobacco Products  
Email – Recommendation for Suspension of Testing



Jackson County

## Health Insurance Policy for Users of Tobacco Products

It is generally an accepted medical fact that smoking and the use of tobacco products in any form creates a serious human health hazard. As a concerned employer and a provider of employee health insurance benefits, it is the policy of Jackson County Government to provide a smoke-free workplace and to discourage the use of tobacco products in any form. Jackson County Government is seriously committed to assisting tobacco product users to quit. As such, the county will provide cessation support through its Employee Assistance Program (EAP), employee wellness program, and through the purchase of cessation products under the outpatient prescription drug program.

This new policy supersedes a prior policy (adopted April 1, 2013) which provided a separate group health insurance coverage plan for users of tobacco products. This new policy is applicable to all health plan eligible employees (of any age) and retirees (under age 65), regardless of his/her hire date. All health plan eligible employees (of any age) and retirees (under age 65) must certify their status as a user or non-user of tobacco products at the time they begin health plan eligible employment and annually at open enrollment. A completed certification form indicates an employee/retiree understands:

- Mandatory substance testing occurs at the time of hire and annually at open enrollment.
- Identified tobacco users are afforded an opportunity to attend a Tobacco Cessation Program offered by the Jackson County Department of Public Health.

Self-identified tobacco products users, health plan eligible employees (of any age) and retirees (under age 65) who refuse to submit to mandatory substance testing, and tobacco products users identified from the results of the mandatory testing are provided the opportunity to attend a Tobacco Cessation Program offered by the Jackson County Department of Public Health. If the Tobacco Cessation Program is not completed within a six-month period, the individual will no longer qualify for the health plan's discounted rate. The non-discounted rate will go into effect six months after the date of hire or January 1<sup>st</sup> for health plan eligible employees (of any age) and retirees (under age 65) covered by the health plan as of July 1<sup>st</sup>. This non-discounted rate may change on an annual basis as permitted by law.

Any health plan eligible employee (of any age) or retiree (under age 65), whose mandatory substance testing results indicate the individual to be a non-tobacco user will continue at the discounted rate until the next mandatory substance testing date. However, that individual is obligated to notify the county group employee benefits administrator if his/her non-tobacco user status changes prior to the next mandatory substance testing date.

Jackson County Government pledges to be uniform and consistent in the administration of this policy. The administration of this policy requires health plan eligible employees (of any age) and retirees (under age 65) to submit to mandatory substance testing to verify use/non-use of tobacco products as directed by Jackson County. Violations of this policy or providing false information may result in disciplinary action, including dismissal and the obligation by the employee or retiree to reimburse any cost of medical benefits received as a result of fraudulent disclosure.

The County Manager is given administrative authorization as is necessary to implement this policy and ensure compliance.

ADOPTED the 16<sup>th</sup> day of April, 2019.

  
Angela M. Winchester, Clerk to the Board



  
Brian Thomas McMahan, Chairman



Kathleen Breedlove - HR <kathleenbreedlove@jacksonnc.org>

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## Tobacco Swabs - Open Enrollment

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**Shelley Carraway - Health Director** <shelleycarraway@jacksonnc.org>

Mon, Jun 8, 2020 at 9:52 AM

To: Kathleen Breedlove - HR <kathleenbreedlove@jacksonnc.org>, Anna Lippard <annalippard@jacksonnc.org>

Good morning Kathleen,

I recommend that the policy's mandatory tobacco testing of all active employees and retirees via a swab continues to be suspended until at least the end of the year - more importantly until there is a proven vaccine. While operations may be phasing back in, the virus has not changed and certain precautions must still be followed. The use of a swab procedure for something that is not to detect disease is not prudent. There is a nicotine blood test that is \$80 (our cost). I understand that at that cost it would be cost prohibitive to offer all employees but it is an option.

As to the class, we will be able to offer a Tobacco Cessation class. This year, we have been discussing a virtual class (like Zoom). Our Health Education staff is working on developing an online class for tobacco users. One suggestion is to have all who were positive for tobacco last year be required to attend the virtual/online class. If they claim they have stopped tobacco use, we could do the blood test on those that claim to now be tobacco free. It is a higher cost but I predict we would not have many of them.