

BYU opts out of Affordable Care Act requirements, causing potential fines for thousands of students

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PROVO, Utah (ABC 4 Utah) - Thousands of local college students could be in for some hefty fines this tax season, and some are blaming the burden on their university.

Some students at Brigham Young University are learning that the school's health insurance plans do not meet guidelines laid out by the Affordable Care Act.

For graduate student Jacob Newman, the start of the school year is stressful enough as it is.

"I actually found out about this happening through facebook, not through BYU," Newman told Good 4 Utah's Ali Monsen.

After learning he and thousands of other students will potentially face fines up to \$325 per person this tax season, the disgruntled college kid started asking questions.

"BYU was not transparent about the fact that this is happening. They're not telling us why this is happening. I mean, is it about contraception? Is it about the amount they'll cover? What's going on?" Newman asked.

Turns out, BYU student health insurance plans no longer qualify as 'minimal essential coverage' under the Affordable Care Act, or simply put, the school will not comply with a number of government mandated requirements. For a temporary period of time, BYU's insurance plans were grandfathered in to the system, so to speak, but now time is up, and the university has opted out of ACA requirements.

"[BYU insurance] is still a great service for the students. It's still available to them offered at a reasonable cost," explained Todd Hollingshead, a spokesperson for BYU. "We do want them to be aware of these things, and we want them to look at all the options and to weigh their individual situations out," he explained.

Right now, about 30 percent of the BYU student body -- or 10,000 students -- use the university's health center and insurance policies, but not all of those people will be affected.

"Most of our students shouldn't be affected by this because they don't meet the income requirement," Hollingshead explained.

Right now, the poverty level threshold is \$11,770 per year, so students who are enrolled in university insurance and make more than that amount now face some important decisions.

"A lot of people have shared blog posts and have been kind of upset about it," one student said.

"I've heard a bunch of different stories with fines and difficulties dealing with that program, so I don't want to deal with that my freshman year," another student laughed.

Newman plans on paying up this tax season and then finding insurance elsewhere because fines will more than double next year.

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