

Reimbursement for patient self-isolation counseling at time of COVID-19 testing

On July 30, 2020, the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) announced that payment is available to physicians and health care providers to counsel patients — at the time of coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) testing — about the importance of self-isolation after they are tested and prior to symptom onset.

Per the CDC, COVID-19 transmission may occur from symptomatic, pre-symptomatic, and asymptomatic individuals. This reality emphasizes the importance of education about self-isolation, as the spread of the virus can be reduced significantly if patients isolate earlier, while waiting for test results or symptom onset. CDC models show that when individuals tested for the virus are separated from others and placed in quarantine, there can be up to an 86% reduction in transmission, compared to just a 40% reduction if the person waits to isolate until after symptoms arise.

The CDC advises that provider counseling to patients (at the time of their COVID-19 testing) should include discussion of:

- The immediate need for isolation, even before results are available,
- The importance of informing their immediate household members that they also should be tested for COVID-19,
- Disease signs and symptoms, and
- Services available to the test patient to aid in isolating at home.

In addition, the CMS suggests patients testing positive should be counseled that:

- They should wear a mask at all times
- They will be contacted by public health authorities and asked to provide information for contact tracing, and
- They should notify their immediate household members and recent contacts, in case those individuals should be tested and self-isolate as well.



CMS will use existing Evaluation and Management (E&M) CPT-4 codes 99201 – 99205 (new patient) or 99211 – 99215 (established patient) to reimburse physicians and other providers eligible to bill CMS for patient counseling services. Regardless of where a test is administered — doctor's offices, urgent care clinics, hospitals, and community drive-through or pharmacy testing sites — **a physician who provides pre-results counseling can charge and bill the appropriate level code.**

For more information:

- Medicare Fee-For-Service (FFS) Response to the Public Health Emergency on the Coronavirus (COVID-19) MLN Matters Special Edition Article SE20011 (www.cms.gov/files/document/se20011.pdf)
- CMS counseling checklist, including resource links (www.cms.gov/files/document/counseling-checklist.pdf)

Questions? Please contact us today.

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