

COVID-19 Information for our Health Care Provider Partners

-PLEASE SHARE WITH ALL PRACTICE LOCATIONS AND PERTINENT STAFF-

To: Participating Physicians, Nurse Practitioners and Physician Assistants
Date: April 10, 2020
Subject: Telehealth Audio Only and Asynchronous Messaging (“Online Digital E/M”) Option for E/M Visits; Answers to Frequently Asked Questions about Telehealth

To assist our participating providers in delivering care to our members during the COVID-19 State of Emergency, Excellus BlueCross BlueShield will provide reimbursement for evaluation and management (E/M) visit codes when they are provided via telehealth through audio (telephone) only. This update is effective as of March 13, 2020 and is applicable to all lines of business.

This temporary contingency during the State of Emergency will ensure that our members have access to their health care providers from the safety of their homes, with no barriers to care if they do not have video capability. There is no member cost-share (i.e., copay, coinsurance, deductible) for any telehealth services during the State of Emergency.

It's important to note that we are working with urgency to configure our systems to accept these new billing scenarios, but in the event that you receive a telehealth claim denial or copay applied in error for dates of service beginning March 13, 2020, we will automatically adjust any impacted claims with no action required on your part and no need to rebill or contact Customer Care or Provider Relations. We anticipate all system configuration work will be completed by April 17, 2020. We expect that most adjustments will be completed during the month of May.

Billing E/M Visits Conducted Via Telephone During the COVID-19 State of Emergency

- CPT[®] codes 99201-99215, used to bill new and established patient office visits, can be provided through telehealth via telephone only for commercial and Medicare programs (see the chart on page 3) during the State of Emergency. (These services may also be provided via real-time video or in-person.) For these lines of business, if a telephone service does not meet the criteria of these E/M codes, you should submit telephone codes 99441-99443. For Medicaid Managed Care, Child Health Plus, Healthy NY and the Essential Plan, please follow the Medicaid instructions, which require the use of CPT codes 99441-99443 only.

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- For commercial and Medicare Advantage programs, E/M CPT codes 99201-99215 will be reimbursed at the same rate as if performed face-to-face in the office setting and will not be subject to member cost-share (i.e., copay, coinsurance, deductible).
- E/M codes may only be billed if the service:
 - Is medically necessary and falls within the standard of care.
 - Meets criteria contained with the code's definition as documented in the CPT code manual.
 - Total time on the telephone with the patient is the same as it would be if you were performing the service face-to-face in the office setting. Time can be considered a key or controlling factor of the telephone only encounter if at least 50 percent of the encounter includes counseling and/or coordination of care.
- Recommended CPT codes, modifiers and place of service codes are noted in the chart below.

Frequently Asked Telehealth Questions and Answers

Q: When do we use modifier 95 vs. GT?

A: Modifier 95 may only be used for real-time audio-visual services for CPT codes listed on Appendix P of the official CPT® coding manual. All other real-time audio-video telehealth services should be reported using modifier GT.

Q: When do we use modifier GQ?

A: Although CPT defines modifier GQ as "services delivered via asynchronous telecommunications system," during the COVID-19 State of Emergency, New York state has re-purposed this modifier to identify covered services performed via audio (telephone only). During the State of Emergency, the health plan is using modifier GQ to identify telephone only E/M services.

Q: Are preventive health visits via telehealth covered?

A: Since a physical exam is a key component of preventive health visits for children (codes 99381-99385, 99391-99395 and G0513-G0514), women (codes 99384-99387, 99394-99397 and S0610, S0612) and all adults (codes 99385-99387, 99395-99397, G0438-G0439 and G0513-G0514), the CPT code definition of the service cannot be met via telehealth. In contrast, the Medicare annual wellness visit does not include a physical exam as it is primarily a health risk assessment reported under codes G0438 or G0439. As a result, G0438 and G0439 may be reported via audio-only (i.e., telephone) or using audio-video technology.

Q: Can we see a new patient via telephone only?

A: Yes, telephone only telehealth visits are available for both new and established patients for all lines of business during the COVID-19 State of Emergency.

Q: Do copays still apply for in-person visits?

A: Yes, copays should be collected for any in-person services not related to COVID-19 for which a copay would normally apply. However, there are no copays for any services rendered via telehealth during the State of Emergency.

Q: Can nurses bill for telehealth services?

A: Services rendered by an RN or LPN should be reported under the supervising physician using CPT code 99211. This includes telephone only E/M handled by a registered nurse conducting patient prescreening if the call does not result in a scheduled visit. (Continued on the next page)

Telephone Only - Professional Biller				
Commercial				
Service	Provider Type	Applicable Code(s)	Modifier	Place of Service
Telephone	Nurse (RN, LPN)	99211	GQ	Any applicable POS
Telephone	MD/DO/NP/PA	99441-99443	N /A	2
Telephone	MD/DO/NP/PA - E&M	99201-99215	GQ	Any applicable POS
Medicare Advantage				
Service	Provider Type	Applicable Code(s)	Modifier	Place of Service
Telephone	Nurse (RN, LPN)	99211	GQ	Any applicable POS
Telephone	MD/DO/NP/PA	99441-99443	N/A	2
Telephone	MD/DO/NP/PA - E&M	99201-99215	GQ	Any applicable POS
Virtual Check-In	MD/DO/NP/PA	G2012	N/A	Any applicable POS
Telephone AWW	MD/DO/NP/PA	G0438-G0439	GQ	Any applicable POS
Medicaid Managed Care, Child Health Plus, Healthy NY, Essential Plan				
Service	Provider Type	Applicable Code(s)	Modifier	Place of Service
Telephone	Nurse (RN, LPN)	99211	GQ	Any applicable POS
Telephone	MD/DO/NP/PA	99441-99443	N/A	Any applicable POS

CPT also includes codes for asynchronous messaging medical evaluations. If you provide these services, please report them using the code/modifier combinations in the chart below:

Asynchronous Messaging ("Online Digital E/M")				
Commercial				
Service	Provider Type	Applicable Codes	Modifier	Place of Service
Asynchronous Messaging	MD/DO/NP/PA	99421-99423	N/A	2
Medicare Advantage				
Service	Provider Type	Applicable Codes	Modifier	POS
Asynchronous Messaging	MD/DO/NP/PA	99421-99423	N/A	2
Medicaid Managed Care, Child Health Plus, Healthy NY, Essential Plan*				
Service	Provider Type	Applicable Codes	Modifier	POS
Asynchronous Messaging	MD/DO/NP/PA	None		

*These lines of business do not cover asynchronous messaging medical evaluations.