



## Correct Coding and Documentation Resource Sheet

| Policy                | Article-005              |
|-----------------------|--------------------------|
| <b>Effective Date</b> | <b>01/01/2026</b>        |
| Reviewed/Revised Date | 03/23/2026               |
| Next Review Date      | 03/23/2027               |
| Origination Date      | 01/01/2026               |
| Originated Department | Correct Coding Integrity |

### E/M Emergency Department Services Educational Guide

| Audience                                                                                                                                                                                         |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Clinical Providers: Physicians, NPs, PAs working in ED</li> <li>• Medical Coders &amp; CDI Specialists</li> <li>• Compliance and Audit Staff</li> </ul> |

| Emergency Services:                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |         |                                 |           |                                                     |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------|---------------------------------|-----------|-----------------------------------------------------|
| <b>1. Emergency Department (ED) E/M Service:</b><br><b>1.1</b> Evaluation and management services are provided in an ED setting for patients requiring urgent or emergent evaluation, typically for acute illness or injury.<br><b>2. Key Points:</b><br><b>2.1</b> ED services are time and MDM-based.<br><b>2.2</b> CPT codes for ED services reflect the severity of the patient's condition and the complexity of care.<br><b>2.3</b> Documentation must support medical necessity, MDM, and the level of service. |         |                                 |           |                                                     |
| CPT 2026 E/M Codes & Typical Time                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |         |                                 |           |                                                     |
| CPT Code                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               | Setting | Typical Time on Date of Service | MDM Level | Notes                                               |
| 99281                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  | ED      | 15 min                          | Minimal   | Minor problem, low complexity                       |
| 99282                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  | ED      | 25 min                          | Low       | Low-moderate complexity, straightforward            |
| 99283                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  | ED      | 35 min                          | Moderate  | Moderate severity, multiple diagnoses, moderate MDM |

|       |    |        |      |                                                              |
|-------|----|--------|------|--------------------------------------------------------------|
| 99284 | ED | 50 min | High | High severity, high complexity, potentially life-threatening |
| 99285 | ED | 70 min | High | Critical problem, very high risk, intensive MDM              |

**Tip:** CPT 99281–99285 are level-determined by MDM or total time, not by setting alone.

| <b>Medical Decision Making (MDM) – ED Focus</b> |                |                            |                                                     |                                                       |
|-------------------------------------------------|----------------|----------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Component</b>                                | <b>Minimal</b> | <b>Low</b>                 | <b>Moderate</b>                                     | <b>High</b>                                           |
| Number/Complexity of Problems                   | 1 minor        | 2 minor / 1 stable chronic | Multiple stable chronic or acute                    | Life-threatening / severe acute                       |
| Amount & Complexity of Data                     | Minimal        | Limited (labs/imaging)     | Moderate (labs, imaging, outside records, consults) | Extensive, multiple sources, high-risk interpretation |
| Risk of Complications / Morbidity               | Minimal        | Low                        | Moderate                                            | High – immediate threat to life or organ function     |

**Educational Tip:** ED documentation should highlight acuity, risk, and interventions performed.

### Documentation Essentials:

For each ED encounter, documentation should include:

- 1. Chief Complaint / Reason for Visit** – concise and specific
- 2. History of Present Illness (HPI)** – describe onset, severity, progression
- 3. Past Medical History / Medications / Allergies** – relevant to the acute problem
- 4. Physical Examination** – problem-focused or extended based on patient acuity
- 5. Medical Decision Making (MDM):**
  - 5.1** Number & complexity of problems
  - 5.2** Data reviewed, ordered, interpreted
  - 5.3** Risk of morbidity or complications
- 6. Assessment & Plan / Interventions:**
  - 6.1** Diagnoses, procedures, treatment plan
  - 6.2** Disposition (admit, discharge, observation)
- 7. Time / Counseling Documentation:**
  - 7.1** If total time is used for code selection, document start/end times, activities,

counseling, care coordination

**Example Time-Based Note:**

*"Total 45 min: 20 min direct patient care, 15 min reviewing labs & imaging, 10 min counseling patient/family regarding discharge instructions and follow-up care."*

**CDI & Audit Considerations**

1. Always document acuity and complexity of the ED patient
2. Include data reviewed (labs, imaging, outside records, consults)
3. Specify risk to the patient to support code selection
4. Document interventions and disposition
5. Ensure clarity: avoid vague statements like "patient evaluated" without detail

**Common Audit Triggers in ED:**

1. Missing chief complaint or history
2. Vague exam documentation
3. Ambiguous MDM justification
4. Incomplete documentation of interventions or disposition

**References**

- CPT 2026 Professional Edition, AMA
- AMA CPT Assistant, ED guidance
- CMS Evaluation & Management Services Guide
- Official ICD-10-CM / CPT coding rules

**Review/Revision/Approval History**

| Date       | Description                                |
|------------|--------------------------------------------|
| 01/01/2026 | Correct Coding Integrity                   |
| 03/23/2026 | Revised by Mountain Health CO-OP Committee |

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