

CRITICAL CARE

Problem

What criteria must be met to use critical care codes?

Clarification

- Critical care codes 99291-99292 are used when a physician provides direct delivery of medical care for a critically ill or critically injured patient. A critical illness/injury acutely impairs one or more vital organ systems such that there is a high probability of imminent or life-threatening deterioration in the patient’s condition.
- Documentation must include time spent by the physician providing critical care services. If time is not documented, the service may be denied even if documentation supports medical necessity.
- In a teaching setting, the teaching physician must be present during the time for which the claim is submitted.

Critical Care Examples

- Physician emergently called to see patient
- Documentation supports evidence of threat of imminent deterioration in patient’s condition
- Documentation of a critical illness/injury that acutely impairs one or more body systems
- Physician’s services required to prevent further decline of the patient’s life-threatening condition
- Documentation of services provided to support vital system function
- Discussion with family to determine medically necessary treatment decisions

Critical Care Threshold Times	
Code	Time
Appropriate E/M code	Less than 30 min.
99291	30 - 74 min. (30 min. - 1 hr. 14 min.)
99291, 99292 x 1	75 - 104 min. (1 hr. 15 min. - 1 hr. 44 min.)
99291, 99292 x 2	105 - 134 min. (1 hr. 45 min. - 2 hr. 14 min.)
99291, 99292 x 3	135 - 164 min. (2 hr. 15 min. - 2 hr. 44 min.)

Services Not Reported with Critical Care Codes

- Critical care of less than 30 minutes duration
- Services provided to a patient who is in the critical care unit but is not critically ill/injured