

CODING CORNER

Getting it right for COVID-19

By Jennifer Swindle



Coronaviruses (CoV) are a large family of viruses that cause illness ranging from the common cold to more severe diseases such as Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS-CoV) and Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS-CoV). The novel coronavirus (nCoV) is a new strain that has not been previously identified in humans. Common signs of infection include respiratory symptoms, fever, cough, shortness of breath and breathing difficulties. In more severe cases, infection can cause pneumonia, severe acute respiratory syndrome, kidney failure, and even death.

Because of the declared public health emergency, the WHO created an emergency ICD-10 code to identify this new coronavirus. Code U07.1, COVID-19, was added to ICD-10-CM with the update effective April 1, 2020.

Codes for COVID-19	
Z11.59	Encounter for screening for other viral diseases; patient shows no sign or symptoms for COVID-19
Z03.818	Encounter for observation for suspected exposure to other biological agents ruled out
Z20.828	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Contact with and suspected exposure to other viral communicable diseases Confirmed exposure to someone with COVID-19
B97.29	For coding encounters that occurred on April 1, 2020 or thereafter: Other coronavirus as the cause of diseases classified elsewhere. Code the condition as primary, such as pneumonia due to COVID-19.
U07.1	Encounters after April 1, 2020: COVID-19. This is primary code.

Coding for signs/symptoms:

- Code the encounter to the level of specificity known; if a definitive diagnosis is not known, code and report signs and symptoms

- If a definitive diagnosis is known, signs and symptoms that are an integral part of the disease process should not be coded separately
- Of special note, it would not be appropriate to assign code B34.2, Coronavirus infection, unspecified, for COVID-19 since this code is for unspecified sites and COVID-19 cases have usually been respiratory in nature. Do not assign code U07.1 for cases documented as "possible," "probable" or "suspected." Instead, assign codes for the signs or symptoms present or exposure to the virus.

Scenario	Codes
Patient presents with no symptoms, but worried, as he/she had been at an event with a large population they did not know and the press showed some instances of people being exposed in attendance of same event. No COVID-19 identified.	Z03.818 (Encounter for observation for suspected exposure to other biological agents ruled out)
Patient presents with cough and fever, worried, as he/she had recently had dinner with a person who is now hospitalized with COVID-19	Z20.828 (exposure) R05 (cough) R50.9 (fever)
Patient presents with cough and fever; after testing it is confirmed that patient has an acute bronchitis due to COVID-19	U07.1 COVID-19 J20.8 (acute bronchitis due to other specified organism)
Hospitalized patient has Acute respiratory distress syndrome (ARDS) due to COVID-19	U07.1 COVID-19 J80 Acute respiratory disease syndrome

For more information:

[The new ICD code](#)

[The CDC's official coding guidance](#)



Jennifer Swindle, CPC, CIC, CPMA, CEMC, CFPC, AAPC Fellow, CICA, RHIT, CCS, CCS-P, CDIP, AHIMA-Approved ICD-10-CM/PCS Trainer, is Salud's Vice President of Quality and Service Excellence