

Conquer New E/M Time-Based Billing Rule



Your office visit reimbursements can benefit from the E/M 2021 coding changes that **start on Jan. 1st** provided you master making these new guidelines work for you.

The CPT 2021 E/M coding rule changes are the biggest in the last 20 years. And now that both AMA and CMS have mandated you report your services in accordance with these massive changes, you must quickly get your head around this entirely new system. Keep this cheat sheet handy to master the new time-based billing requirements more easily than you ever imagined.

1

E/M New Rules Are Mandatory

You may have heard that you can ignore using the new codes. However, both CMS and AMA have said that you must follow the CPT 2021 guidelines starting Jan 1st – or you'll be out of coding compliance.

2

Changes Apply Only to Office Visit Codes

While you may see that the new rules are for office/outpatient services, this means you use them for CPT codes 99201-99215 only. There are other new CPT 2021 E/M codes such as for prolonged services, but you should apply the time-based billing guidelines only to your office visit code selection.

3

Time Is Allowed Even on Non-Counseling Dominated Visits

Currently, you can only use the typical time indicated for an office visit to choose the appropriate code when the majority of the visit is spent on counseling and/or coordination of care. When the visit does not support that criteria, you code the E/M service based on its history, exam, and medical decision making.

With CPT 2021 changes, you can choose the office visit based on either time or medical decision making. The service no longer needs to meet the counseling requirement. See table in #4 on the next page to see how the 2021 rules stack up.

The proven advice in this E/M coding cheat sheet was provided by coding and training expert, Kim Huey, MJ, CHC, CPC, CCS-P, PCS, CPCO, during her recent online training "Master Massive E/M Coding Changes (99201-99215) by Jan. 1 Deadline," hosted by Healthcare Training Leader (800-767-1181). Reproduction of this tool is authorized for non-commercial use only as long as this attribution statement is included on all copies.

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Time-Based Billing: Master 2021 vs 2020 Rules

CPT	Code visit based on time when	Time is defined as
2020	Counseling and/or coordination of care comprises more than 50% of the encounter's time	Face-to-face time between patient and physician and/or nonphysician provider
2021	Visit meets code's typical time range – or you can use medical decision making; it's your choice!	Not just face-to-face time – include items like you see below

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2021 Time Includes These Items

Take advantage of coding based on time by capturing every minute spent and documented on performing the following activities:

Prep-Work

- **preparing** to see the patient (eg, review of tests)
- obtaining and/or reviewing **separately obtained history**

Exam

- performing a medically appropriate **examination and/or evaluation**
- **counseling** and educating the patient/family/caregiver
- **ordering** medications, tests, or procedures

Follow-Up

- documenting clinical information in the **EMR**
- referring and communicating with other **health care professionals** (when not separately reported)
- independently interpreting results (not separately reported) and **communicating results** to the patient/family/caregiver
- **care coordination** (not separately reported)

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Office Visit Minutes 2020 to 2021 Comparison

Get to know how many minutes CMS and AMA include in an E/M service to meet the code's time requirement.

Code	2020	2021
99201	10	Deleted
99202	20	15-29
99203	30	30-44
99204	45	45-59
99205	60	60-74

Code	2020	2021
99211	5	Not Specified
99212	10	10-19
99213	15	20-29
99214	25	30-39
99215	40	40-54



For more expert, step-by-step advice on the massive 2021 E/M coding changes effective Jan. 1st, join Leonta Williams, RHIA, CCS, CCDS, CPC, PCPO, CEMC on **Dec. 16th at 3pm ET** for her LIVE 90-minute online training. Go to www.hctrainingleader.com/product/2021-em-coding-changes-cpt-updates/ to sign up today and take an extra **10% off** by entering code **CPT21** at checkout.