

Acute and Chronic Respiratory Failure

A LIFEWISE DOCUMENTATION AND CODING SERIES FOR PROVIDERS

Overview

Respiratory failure occurs when not enough oxygen transfers from the lungs to the blood, or when the lungs can't properly remove carbon dioxide from the blood. Documenting the correct status of respiratory failure ensures that the patient's true condition status is represented in the medical record and accurately captured on the claim.

Respiratory failure can be characterized as:

- Acute
- Chronic
- Acute and Chronic
 - Hypoxemic: Lower oxygen in the blood but close to normal carbon dioxide levels
 - Hypercapnic/Hypercarbic: Lower oxygen in the blood and too much carbon dioxide in the blood. Patients with chronic respiratory failure commonly have severe COPD or other chronic lung diseases such as cystic fibrosis and pulmonary fibrosis, as well as chronic dependence on supplemental oxygen.
- Postprocedural

A common error made in documenting respiratory failure is neglecting to document the condition as both chronic and acute, so that the combination code for acute and chronic respiratory failure can be submitted on the claim.

Documentation and Coding

Provider documentation is fundamental to accurate code selection. When documenting and selecting diagnosis codes for an encounter with a patient with respiratory failure, follow these steps:

1. Specify the acuity of the failure as one of the following:
 - a. Acute
 - b. Chronic
 - c. Acute and Chronic
2. Identify the type of respiratory failure:
 - a. With hypoxemia
 - b. With hypercapnia

3. Document any treatment, including supplemental oxygen dependence, medication, or pulmonary rehabilitation.
4. Document and code any underlying conditions causing the respiratory failure, such as COPD, fibrosis, injury, or pneumonia.

Respiratory failure codes include the following:

Acute	
J96.00	Unspecified whether with hypoxia or hypercapnia
J96.01	With hypoxia
J96.02	With hypercapnia
Chronic	
J96.10	Unspecified whether with hypoxia or hypercapnia
J96.11	With hypoxia
J96.12	With hypercapnia
Acute and Chronic	
J96.20	Unspecified whether with hypoxia or hypercapnia
J96.21	With hypoxia
J96.22	With hypercapnia
Postprocedural	
J95.821	Acute
J95.822	Acute and Chronic

If the status of the patient's respiratory failure is unknown, code one of the following:

Unspecified	
J96.90	Unspecified whether with hypoxia or hypercapnia
J96.91	With hypoxia
J96.92	With hypercapnia

For more information about documentation and coding of respiratory failure and any other chronic or complex condition, email your Quality and Risk Adjustment Provider Clinical Consultant.