

Immunization Administration: New Versus Established Patient Status

Immunization Administration CPT Codes

90460 Immunization administration through 18 years of age via any route of administration, **with counseling by physician or other qualified health care professional**; first or only component of each vaccine or toxoid administered

90461 Immunization administration through 18 years of age via any route of administration, **with counseling by physician or other qualified health care professional**; each additional vaccine or toxoid component administered (List separately in addition to code for primary procedure)

90471 Immunization administration (includes percutaneous, intradermal, subcutaneous, or intramuscular injections); 1 vaccine (single or combination vaccine/toxoid)

90472 Immunization administration (includes percutaneous, intradermal, subcutaneous, or intramuscular injections); each additional vaccine (single or combination vaccine/toxoid) (List separately in addition to code for primary procedure)

90473 Immunization administration by intranasal or oral route; 1 vaccine (single or combination vaccine/toxoid)

90474 Immunization administration by intranasal or oral route; each additional vaccine (single or combination vaccine/toxoid) (List separately in addition to code for primary procedure)

New Versus Established Patient Status

The **yellow highlighted portions** of the 90460-90461 code descriptors listed above play a key role in determining patient status (ie, new versus established).

Since the 90460-90461 immunization administration (IA) codes require that a physician/qualified health care professional provide the vaccine counseling, reporting a code from the 90460-90461 family always establishes the patient.

Reporting IA codes 90471-90474 – which do not include the same requirement – may not. Since IA codes 90471-90474 do not require that a physician/qualified health care professional provide the vaccine counseling, these codes are appropriately reported for encounters where clinical staff (eg, nurse) provides the vaccine counseling – and where the physician/qualified health care professional never provides a face-to-face service.

Per CPT, “a new patient is one who has not received any professional services from the physician/qualified health care professional or another physician/qualified health care professional of the exact same specialty and subspecialty who belongs to the same group practice, within the past three years....solely for the purposes of distinguishing between new and established patients, professional services are those face-to-face services rendered by a physician or other qualified health care professionals who may report E/M services reported by a specific CPT code(s).”

The 90460-90461 codes’ specific requirement of ‘counseling by physician or other qualified health care professional,’ qualify them as professional services.

Since IA codes 90471-90474 do not specifically require ‘counseling by physician or other qualified health care professional,’ they may not qualify as professional services.

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Therefore, when a code(s) from the 90471-90474 family is reported for a clinical staff-only encounter that is the first/only encounter for a patient new to the physician/practice, the patient does not become established via the reporting of the code(s).

Vignettes

Q) A 13-year-old presents for his influenza vaccine as a new patient. He only sees the nurse, who administers the vaccine per standing orders. The IA CPT code reported is 90471. The patient returns in 1 month to see the physician for a sick visit – is he considered a new or established patient?

A) He is considered a **new patient**.

This is due to the fact that the only previously-reported CPT code is 90471 and the patient sees only the nurse. Therefore, in this situation, the 90471-90474 IA codes do not fulfill the requirement for establishing the patient to the physician/practice.

Q) A 7-year-old presents for her influenza vaccine as a new patient. The physician sees the patient and counsels the patient/parent on the vaccine, answering questions. The IA code reported is 90460. The patient returns in 6 months to see the physician for her annual well child exam – is she considered a new or established patient?

A) She is considered an **established patient**.

This is due to the fact that the only previously-reported CPT code is 90460. The 90460-90461 IA codes do fulfill the requirement for establishing the patient to the physician/practice.

Q) A 19-year-old presents for his influenza vaccine as a new patient. The physician sees the patient and counsels the patient on the vaccine, answering questions. The IA code reported is 90471 since the patient is over 18 years of age. The patient returns in 1 month to see the physician for a sick visit – is he considered a new or established patient?

A) He is considered an **established patient**.

This is due to the fact that the only previously-reported CPT code is 90471 -- but the patient sees the physician. Therefore, in this situation, the 90471-90474 IA codes do fulfill the requirement for establishing the patient to the physician/practice.

While the age limit of the 90460-90461 codes (ie, through 18 years of age) prevents the physician from reporting a code from that family for the vaccine counseling performed, the encounter still represents a professional service for purposes of differentiating between a new and established patient because it is performed face-to-face by the physician, thereby establishing the patient to the physician/practice.

****A Note on COVID-19 Immunization Administration****

Q) A child comes in to get the COVID-19 vaccine, not seeing the physician but only the nurse. The patient then comes back to the practice to establish new patient care with one of the physicians. Is the patient considered a new patient or an established patient?

A) The COVID-19 IA code descriptors do not include specific reference to “with counseling by physician or other qualified health care professional” -- as the descriptor for 90460 does. Furthermore, when the AMA published the [first CPT Assistant article](#) about the COVID-19 IA codes, it noted that the COVID-19 IA codes include “**counseling, when performed.**”

This means that the COVID-19 IA codes align more with codes 90471-90474 than they do with codes 90460-90461. For this reason, the patient in this situation should not be considered established by the administration of a COVID-19 vaccine.

NOTE: Payers may enforce their own rules, which may not be consistent with these CPT guidelines.