

Allowable Payments for Emergency Room Care vs. Urgent Care

By definition, CPT codes 99281-99285 are only appropriately billed for services provided in a hospital Emergency Department. Arizona hospital licensure requirements state that emergency services are services which are provided 24 hours a day in a designated area of the hospital. A.A.C. R9-10-216.

Please Note:

- Only Emergency Rooms which are open 24 hours per day, 7 days per week; subject to EMTALA; and licensed as Emergency Rooms can bill CPT codes 99281-99285.
- Urgent Care Centers - even those that are hospital-affiliated, may not bill CPT codes 99281-99285 as these codes are, by definition, only appropriate when billed for services in an ER.

This is not an AHCCCS change to billing protocol, but is a clarification of current coding guidelines.

Submission of a claim using these codes for services provided outside of the 24 hour Emergency Department is a prohibited act under A.R.S. 36-2918 and constitutes the knowing presentation of a claim for medical services that were not provided as claimed. AHCCCS will be monitoring these codes and will disallow payment for any inappropriately billed codes from urgent care centers. Providers submitting such claims are subject to civil monetary penalties and/or criminal prosecution.

In addition, be advised that services in urgent care operations - even those that are hospital-affiliated - are non-emergency outpatient services that may be denied by the patient's health plan if the provider is not in the health plan's network.