

Medical Decision Making for Outpatient E/M Codes (effective January 2021)



E/M code	Time (minutes)	MDM (Two out of three elements)	Number and complexity of problems addressed	Amount and/or complexity of data to review and analyze (Combination of two or combination of three in Category 1)			Risk of complications and/ or morbidity or mortality of patient management (diagnostic testing or treatment)
				CATEGORY 1	CATEGORY 2	CATEGORY 3	
Level 1							
99211	0	N/A	N/A	N/A			N/A
Level 2			Minimal	Minimal or none			Minimal risk
99202	15-29	Straightforward	• 1 self-limited or minor problem	Minimal or no complexity and/or data reviewed			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rest • Gargles • Bandages • Superficial dressings
99212	10-19						
Level 3			Low	Limited (Must meet the requirements of at least 1 of the 2 categories)			Low risk
99203	30-44	Low	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2 or more self-limited or minor problems or • 1 stable chronic illness or • 1 acute, uncomplicated illness or injury 	Category 1: Tests and documents At least 2 from the following:	Category 2: Assessment requiring an independent historian(s)	N/A	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • OTC drugs • Minor surgery without risk factors • PT/OT • IV fluids without additives
99213	20-29			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review of prior external note(s) from each unique source • Review of the result(s) of each unique test • Ordering of each unique test 			
Level 4			Moderate	Moderate (Must meet the requirements of at least 1 out of 3 categories)			Moderate risk
99204	45-59	Moderate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1 or more chronic illnesses with exacerbation, progression or side effects of treatment or • 2 or more stable chronic illnesses or • 1 undiagnosed new problem with uncertain prognosis or • 1 acute illness with systemic symptoms or • 1 acute complicated injury 	Category 1: Tests, documents, or independent historian(s) At least 3 from the following:	Category 2: Independent interpretation of tests	Category 3: Discussion of management or test interpretation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prescription drug management • Decision regarding minor surgery with identified risk factors • Decision regarding elective major surgery without risk factors • Diagnosis or treatment significantly limited by social determinants of health (SDoH) [e.g., socioeconomic status, geographic location, education, employment, transportation access]
99214	30-39			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review of prior external note(s) from each source • Review of the result(s) of each unique test • Ordering of each unique test • Assessment requiring an independent historian(s) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Independent interpretation of a test performed by another physician/other qualified healthcare professional 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discussion of management or test interpretation with external physician/other qualified healthcare professional/ appropriate source 	

Make yourself indispensable. And make your practice invincible.

Access a breadth of educational tools and certification programs that help you personally develop and make meaningful change in practice management.

[Ask an Advisor](#)

Find answers to your critical questions with access to our experienced Ask an Advisor team.

[Learn more](#)

Find more coding and documentation content to boost your organization's revenue cycle on the [MGMA Resources page](#)

MEMBER-BENEFIT TOOLS | PODCASTS | WEBINARS | DATA REPORTS | ARTICLES | ASK AN ADVISOR

Medical Decision Making for Outpatient E/M Codes (effective January 2021)



Level 5		High	Extensive <i>(Must meet the requirements of at least 2 out of 3 categories)</i>			High risk	
99205	60-74	High	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1 or more chronic illnesses with severe exacerbation, progression, or side effects of treatment or 1 acute or chronic illness or injury that poses a threat to life or bodily function 	Category 1: Tests, documents, or independent historian(s) At least 3 from the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Review of prior external note(s) from each source Review of the result(s) of each test Ordering of each test Assessment requiring an independent historian(s) 	Category 2: Independent interpretation of tests <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Independent interpretation of a test performed by another physician/other qualified healthcare professional 	Category 3: Discussion of management or test interpretation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Discussion of management or test interpretation with external physician/other qualified healthcare professional/ appropriate source 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Drug therapy requiring intensive monitoring for toxicity Decision regarding elective major surgery with identified patient or procedure risk factors Decision regarding emergency major surgery Decision regarding hospitalization Decision not to resuscitate or to de-escalate care because of poor prognosis
99215	40-54						
Time-based coding elements* (when performed and documented)							
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reviewing patient's record prior to visit Performing a medically appropriate history and examination Ordering prescription medications, tests, or procedures Independently interpreting results Communicating results to the patient/family/caregiver Obtaining/reviewing separately obtained history from someone other than patient Counseling/educating the patient/family/caregiver Referring and communicating with another healthcare provider(s) when not separately reported during the visit Documenting clinical information in the patient's electronic health record Coordination of care for the patient 							
* Time-based coding is based on total time spent on the date of the encounter.							
Important notes:							
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> E/M code 99201 is deleted in 2021 due to low utilization. Documentation of history and exam will not be counted as an element, but medical necessity must be established by documenting risk and MDM relevant to management of patient's condition. Interpretation of tests or discussion of management with another qualified healthcare professional is considered only when not separately reported. 							

[For more information on these changes, consult the American Medical Association's E/M office revisions for level of MDM \(effective Jan. 1, 2021\).](#)

GET EXPERT ANSWERS FOR ALL YOUR QUESTIONS VIA MGMA

MGMA Consulting is the best line of defense against all your challenges, if only for the simple fact that they have more than 30 years' experience in healthcare and access to industry-leading information and resources. Because they have the elements needed already at their hands, you can benefit from bringing them in to support your organization and community. [Learn more](#)

MGMA Chart Auditing and Coding Education Services puts our team of coders to work, creating personalized experiences that teach and lead your team through practices of establishing accurate coding. Our team works in conjunction with your providers, medical coders, administrators and revenue cycle staff to ensure coding on all levels is compliant. [Learn more](#)