

## Pulmonary Medicine

*This guide provides coverage and payment information for diagnostic ultrasound and related ultrasound guided procedures. This information was obtained from third-party sources and is subject to change without notice, as Medicare and other payers may change their reimbursement policies at any time. This document is for educational purposes only. It is the provider's responsibility to determine and submit appropriate codes, modifiers, and claims for service rendered and to ensure any services provided to patients and submitted for reimbursement are medically necessary. Fujifilm SonoSite makes no guarantees concerning reimbursement or coverage. If you have questions related to how to bill for these services appropriately, please contact your own reimbursement staff or the patient's insurer, as Fujifilm SonoSite cannot provide specific reimbursement guidance.*

### Documentation Requirements

All diagnostic ultrasound examinations, including those when ultrasound is used to guide a procedure, require that permanently recorded images, with measurements, when such measurements are clinically indicated be maintained in the patient's record. The images can be kept in the patient record or some other archive - they do not need to be submitted with the claim. Images can be stored as printed images, on a tape or electronic medium. Documentation of the study must be available to the insurer upon request.

A written report of all ultrasound studies should be maintained in the patient's record. For those anatomic regions that have complete or limited ultrasound codes, note the elements that comprise a complete exam. The report should contain a description of these elements or the reason that an element could not be visualized. If less than the required elements of a complete exam are reported, the limited code for that anatomic region should be used once per patient exam session. A limited exam of an anatomic region should not be reported for the same exam session as a complete exam of the same region.

In the case of ultrasound guidance procedures, the written report may be filed as a separate item in the patient's record or it may be included within the report of the procedure for which the guidance is utilized.<sup>1</sup>

### Third Party Insurance Payment Policies

Effective May 22, 2007, Medicare has a National Coverage Determination ("NCD") regarding ultrasound diagnostic procedures.<sup>2</sup> Per this policy, Medicare will generally reimburse physicians for medically necessary diagnostic ultrasound services, provided the services are within the scope of the physician's license and for the indications outlined in the NCD. Some Medicare Administrative Contractors ("MACs") require that the physician who performs and/or interprets some types of ultrasound examinations be capable of demonstrating relevant, documented training through recent residency training or post-graduate CME and experience. Prior to performing ultrasound procedures, physicians should contact your Part B MAC for details. We recommend also checking for any local coverage determinations ("LCDs") for the service(s) you intend to provide. Some MACs do have policies regarding ultrasound studies of the extremities or ultrasound guidance of certain injections or both.

Payment rules for other non-Medicare payers (e.g., commercial/private payers, Medicare Advantage, Medicaid) vary by payer and plan. Payer rules and guidance should be reviewed, as some plans indicate, for example, what qualifications or credentials are required or which specialties may perform and receive reimbursement for ultrasound services. Some insurers require physicians to submit applications requesting ultrasound be added to their list of services performed in their practice.

Additional requirements may apply, so providers should contact the appropriate plan before submitting claims for ultrasound studies to determine their requirements and request that they add ultrasound to the list of services in your contract.

### Use of Modifiers

In the office setting, a physician who owns the equipment and performs the service him or herself or through an employed or contracted sonographer, may generally bill the global fee, which is represented by the CPT<sup>1</sup> code without any modifiers.

If the site of service is the hospital, the -26 modifier, indicating the professional service only was provided, must be added by the physician to the CPT code for the ultrasound service. Payers will not reimburse physicians for the technical component in the hospital or ASC setting.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> CPT 2017 Professional Edition, American Medical Association, page 455.

<sup>2</sup> Medicare National Coverage Determinations Manual, Ch. 1, Part 4, § 220.5, *Ultrasound Diagnostic Procedures* (Effective May 22, 2007) (Rev. 173, Issued: 09-04-14, Effective: Upon Implementation: of ICD-10, Implementation: Upon Implementation of ICD-10), (available at [https://www.cms.gov/Regulations-and-Guidance/Guidance/Manuals/Downloads/ncd103c1\\_Part4.pdf](https://www.cms.gov/Regulations-and-Guidance/Guidance/Manuals/Downloads/ncd103c1_Part4.pdf))

<sup>3</sup> 2017 Ultrasound Coding Users Guide, American College of Radiology, page 55.

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Providers should review plan guidance to determine whether any additional modifiers may be required depending on the service provided.

## Code Selection

Ultrasound services performed with hand-carried ultrasound systems are reported using the same ultrasound codes that are submitted for studies performed with cart-based ultrasound systems so long as the usual requirements are met. All ultrasound examinations must meet the requirements of medical necessity as set forth by the payer, must meet the requirements of completeness for the code that is chosen, and must be documented in the patient's record, regardless of the type of ultrasound equipment that is used.

It is the physician's responsibility to select the CPT and ICD-10 codes that accurately describe the service performed and the corresponding reason for the study.

## Payment Information

The following chart provides payment information that is based on the national unadjusted Medicare physician fee schedule for the ultrasound services discussed in this guide. Payment will vary by geographic region. Use the column entitled "Global Payment" to estimate reimbursement for services in the physician office setting. Use the "Professional Payment" column to estimate reimbursement to the physician for services provided in facility settings.

Ambulatory Payment Classification (APC) codes and payments are used by Medicare to reimburse facilities for the technical component under the Hospital Outpatient Prospective Payment System (OPPS). Payment rates are also based on the national unadjusted Hospital OPPS amounts. The actual payment will vary by location.

		2017 Medicare Physician Fee Schedule — National Average*			2017 Hospital Outpatient Prospective Payment System (OPPS)†	
CPT Code	CPT Code Descriptor	Global Payment	Professional Payment	Technical Payment	APC Code	APC Payment
76604	Ultrasound, chest (includes mediastinum), real time with image documentation	\$90.08	\$27.63	\$62.45	Packaged	\$0.00

		Medicare Physician Fee Schedule - National Average		Hospital Outpatient Prospective Payment System (OPPS)	
CPT Code	CPT Code Descriptor	Non-Facility Payment	Facility Payment	APC Code	APC Payment
32555	Thoracentesis, needle or catheter, aspiration of the pleural space, with image guidance	\$295.72	\$116.64	5181	\$684.13
32557	Pleural drainage, percutaneous, with insertion of indwelling catheter, with image guidance	\$521.10	\$158.99	5181	\$684.13

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\*Source of Information: Department of Health and Human Services. Center for Medicare and Medicaid Services. CMS Physician Fee Schedule – January 2017 release, RVU17A file

<https://www.cms.gov/Medicare/Medicare-Fee-for-Service-Payment/PhysicianFeeSched/PFS-Relative-Value-Files-Items/RVU17A.html?DLPage=1&DLEntries=10&DLSort=0&DLSortDir=descending>

†Source: CMS OPPS - January 2017 release, CMS-1656-FC <https://www.cms.gov/Medicare/Medicare-Fee-for-Service-Payment/HospitalOutpatientPPS/Hospital-Outpatient-Regulations-and-Notices-Items/CMS-1656-FC.html?DLPage=1&DLEntries=10&DLSort=2&DLSortDir=descending>

Reimbursement rates shown for payment of services under the Physicians Fee Schedule reflect a 2017 conversion factor of \$35.8887

The information in this handout is intended to assist providers in determining appropriate codes and the other information for reimbursement purposes. It represents the information available to SonoSite as of the date listed above. Subsequent guidance might alter the information provided. SonoSite disclaims any responsibility to update the information provided. It is the provider's responsibility to determine and submit appropriate codes, modifiers, and claims for the services rendered. Before filing any claims, providers should verify current requirements and policies with the applicable payer. SonoSite makes no guarantees concerning reimbursement or coverage. A provider should not rely on any information provided by SonoSite in submitting any claim for payment, without confirming that information with an authoritative source.