

Risk Adjustment Coding Academy- Coding Focus

Viral Hepatitis



Hepatitis is a medical term used to describe inflammation of the liver. While it can be caused by toxins or medications hepatitis is most commonly caused by viruses. Viral hepatitis accounts for about 50% of all acute cases in the United States. It is estimated that 250 million people are infected by hepatitis C worldwide, and another 300 million are carriers of the hepatitis B virus.¹

Types of Viral Hepatitis

There are five main types of hepatitis which are caused by viruses:

1. Hepatitis A – caused by ingesting water or food contaminated with fecal matter
2. Hepatitis B – spread through bodily fluids during sexual contact or through blood transfusions
3. Hepatitis C – blood-borne, meaning it is spread through direct contact with infected blood (such as using infected needles)
4. Hepatitis D – also known as delta, only occurs in patients who have hepatitis B
5. Hepatitis E – similar to Hepatitis A, it is an acute condition caused by

ingesting contaminated food or water, which does not lead to chronic hepatitis

Adults with acute Hepatitis A or B usually have symptoms which are similar to the flu and experience fatigue, nausea, vomiting and loss of appetite. Adults with Hepatitis C may or may not be symptomatic, and the virus can go undetected for many years. A diagnosis of hepatitis is usually confirmed by a blood test or liver biopsy.

Acute Versus Chronic

According to the National Institutes of Health (NIH), all of these viruses cause acute viral hepatitis, but some can result in chronic viral hepatitis as well. Acute hepatitis generally resolves within a few months from the date of onset. In other cases, the disease becomes a long-term or chronic illness.²

Hepatitis A and E are considered to be acute in nature and do not lead to chronic hepatitis. Hepatitis B, C and D viruses can cause chronic, sometimes lifelong conditions. Chronic hepatitis can lead to cirrhosis (*i.e.*, scarring of the liver), liver failure and liver cancer (Hepatitis, n.d.). It is estimated that 4.4 million Americans have chronic hepatitis B or chronic hepatitis C.³

For Risk Adjustment purposes, chronic viral hepatitis is included in the CMS-HCC model Version 22 (HCC 29). Complete, specific documentation is required in order to code viral hepatitis correctly. The medical record should indicate the cause or type of viral hepatitis and should also specify if the condition is acute or chronic in nature, as a coder

cannot make assumptions regarding acuity

Coding Guidance

In ICD-9, viral hepatitis codes were located under code category 070, with additional digits required to indicate the specific type (A, B, C, D or E) and acuity of the condition.⁴ In ICD-10, chronic viral hepatitis can be found under code category B18 (HCC 29).⁵ In instances where the documentation does not specify that the viral hepatitis is acute or chronic, coders should assign the appropriate code for unspecified viral hepatitis from category B19 (no HCC).

1. Medical News Today website: Hepatitis: Causes, Symptoms and Treatment (December 2015): medicalnewstoday.com
2. National Center for Biotechnology Information website: Hepatitis (accessed August 2016): cbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmedhealth/PMHT0027053/
3. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention website, Hepatitis (accessed August 2016): <http://www.cdc.gov/stltpublichealth/didyouknow/topic/hepatitis.html>
4. Hart, A. C., Stegman, M. S., & Ford, B. (2011). ICD-9-CM for physicians, volumes 1 & 2: 2012 professional: International Classification of Diseases, 9th revision, Clinical Modification. Eden Prairie, MN: OptumInsight.
5. Anita Schmidt, K.K., & P.W. (2016). ICD-10-CM Expert for Physicians. Optum360