

Documentation and Coding: Spinal Cord Injury

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At Healthfirst, we are committed to helping providers accurately document and code their patients' health records. This tip sheet is intended to assist providers and coding staff with the documentation and ICD-10-CM selection on services submitted to Healthfirst—specifically for common types of **spinal cord injury**. It provides information from industry sources about proper coding practice. However, this document does not represent or guarantee that Healthfirst will cover and/or pay for services outlined. Coverage decisions are based on the terms of the applicable evidence of coverage and the provider's participation agreement. This includes the determination of any amounts that Healthfirst or the member owes the provider.

Spinal cord injury is a severe medical condition. Most cases are due to trauma to the vertebral column which affects the spinal cord's ability to send and receive messages from the brain to the body systems that control autonomic, sensory, and motor functions.

Documentation should include

Associated Conditions	Diagnostic Tools	Level, Laterality, and Completeness of Lesion	Type of Encounter	Treatment
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Transient paralysis • Open wound of the neck, thorax, or abdomen, lower back, and pelvis • Fracture of cervical vertebra, thoracic vertebra, or vertebra 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • MRI • CT Scans • X-rays 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cervical (levels - C1-C8) • Thoracic (levels - T1-T12) • Lumbar (levels - L1-L5) • Complete lesion • Anterior cord syndrome • Brown Séquard syndrome • Other incomplete lesion 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Initial • Subsequent • Sequela 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Surgery • Physical Therapy • Immobilization • Rehabilitation • Medications (opioids, corticosteroids, NSAIDS, antispasmodics, and muscle relaxants)

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Coding Tips

- Code to the highest level of injury.
- Code any complications or conditions followed by the injury code.
- Completeness of lesion:
 - Complete lesion—complete bilateral loss of function
 - Anterior cord syndrome—compromised anterior spinal artery
 - Brown Séquard syndrome—right or left side of spinal cord
 - Other incomplete lesion—some motor functions
- 7th digit required to describe the status of the injury:
 - A- Initial encounter—Receiving active treatment; does not need to be the 1st visit once receiving treatment
 - D- Subsequent encounter—Receiving routine care; during healing and recovery phase, instead of aftercare Z code.
 - S- Sequela—Healed with residuals; when complications or conditions arise as a direct result of the condition.

ICD-10 Codes & Descriptions

ICD-10-CM	Description
S14.*	Injury of nerves and spinal cord at neck level
S24.*	Injury of nerves and spinal cord at thorax level
S34.*	Injury of lumbar and sacral spinal cord and nerves at abdomen, lower back and pelvis level

*Requires additional digit to complete the diagnosis code.

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Coding Example

<p>Patient here for follow-up – T4 unstable burst fracture, retropulsion of the T4 vertebral body into the spinal canal, and complete paralysis below the clavicle one year ago when the injury occurred. Has a medical history of allergies, hypertension, and GERD; ROS: Musculoskeletal negative; Exam: no neurological improvement—complete paralysis of lower extremities; A/P: s/p T4 unstable burst fracture one year ago, with complete paralysis below clavicle.</p>	<p>G82.21 – Paraplegia, complete</p> <p>S24.112S – Complete lesion at T2–T6 level of thoracic spinal cord, sequela</p> <p>S22.042S – Unstable burst fracture of fourth thoracic vertebra, sequela</p>	<p>Patient has residuals from the fracture, complete paraplegia; as per coding guidelines, code first the paraplegia then the lesions and fractures of the spinal cord. Injury code secondary with sequela.</p>
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Questions?

Contact us at [#Risk_Adjustments_and_clinical_Documentation@healthfirst.org](mailto:Risk_Adjustments_and_clinical_Documentation@healthfirst.org).

For additional documentation and coding guidance, please visit the coding section at HFproviders.org.

References

- www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/spinal-cord-injury/symptoms-causes/syc-20377890
- www.aans.org/en/Patients/Neurosurgical-Conditions-and-Treatments/Spinal-Cord-Injury
- www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK560721
- www.aapc.com/blog/61089-7-top-tips-for-mastering-icd-10-cm-7th-characters
- [ICD-10-CM Official Coding Guidelines, FY 2023](#)