

# Payment Policy: Intravenous Hydration

Reference Number: LA.PP.012

Effective Date: 08/2020

Last Review Date: 04/2025

Coding Implications  
Revision Log

**See Important Reminder at the end of this policy for important regulatory and legal information.**

## Policy Overview

According to the American Medical Association (AMA), CPT code 96360 is used to report intravenous (IV) infusions for hydration purposes. The code is used to report the first 31 minutes to 1 hour of hydration therapy. CPT code 96361 is used to report each additional hour of IV hydration therapy and should be reported in addition to the primary procedure code 96360.

IV infusions are prepackaged fluids and electrolytes (i.e., normal saline, D5-1/2 normal saline+30mEq KCl/liter). CPT codes 96360 and 96361 should not be used to report infusions of drugs or other substances. When fluids are used to administer the drug(s), the administration of the fluid is considered incidental hydration and not separately reportable.

The CMS National Correct Coding Policy Manual also states, *"If the sole purpose of the fluid administration is to maintain patency of an access device, the infusion is neither diagnostic nor therapeutic and should not be reported separately."*

Some chemotherapeutic agents and other therapeutic agents require a pre or post hydration infusion in order to avoid toxicities. For IV hydration to be reportable under these circumstances, a minimum hydration time of 31 minutes is required. Furthermore, CPT states, *"However, the hydration codes 96360 or 96361 are not used when the purpose of the intravenous fluid is to "keep open" an IV line prior or subsequent to a therapeutic infusion, or as a free-flowing IV during chemotherapy or other therapeutic infusion."*

## Reimbursement

### Claims Reimbursement Edit

The Health Plan's code auditing software flags provider claims billed with CPT codes 96360 and 96361 for clinical validation to ensure adherence to correct coding principles. This review is performed by a registered nurse who will review the prospective claim and claims history. Clinical validation occurs prior to claims payment. Once a claim has been clinically validated, it is either released for payment or denied.

### Rationale for Edit

CPT code 96360 should not be used to report IV hydration therapy of 30 minutes or less or if performed as a concurrent service. CPT code 96361 should only be used to report hydration infusion intervals of greater than 30 minutes beyond 1 hour increments. These codes should not be used to keep the vein open (KVO), subsequent to a therapeutic infusion or as a free-flowing IV for other therapeutic infusions.

### Exception

When IV hydration is billed in the emergency room setting, the health plan will allow one (1) unit of CPT code 96360 without clinical validation.

Prepayment Clinical Validation Includes:

- *Diagnosis supporting the patient required hydration therapy, review of member and provider's claim history*

On Reconsideration/Appeal:

Medical records which document:

- *Physician's order of hydration therapy.*
- *Start and stop times and a rate of infusion of intravenous fluid that would support hydration therapy was administered for the reported length of time.*

Clinical Scenarios

- A patient presents to the Emergency Department with a migraine. A maintenance IV line is started. Morphine Sulfate is given via IV push. Appropriate coding would be: 96374 x1 (initial push). Hydration would not be reported as it was not for therapeutic purposes but to merely keep the line open.
- A patient presents to the ER for nausea and vomiting x 24 hours. An IV is placed, labs are drawn and fluid is infused at a rate of 500ml/hour x 2 hours. The patient is reassessed after the two hours and it is decided that another 1 liter is warranted at the same above rate. Therefore, the patient received a total of 4 hours of hydration. It is appropriate to report 96360 X1 as the initial code, and 96361 x 3 for the subsequent hours. After the second bolus of 1 liter, the order read to KVO at 125ml/hour. KVO or TKO (keep line open) is not separately reportable as it is considered line maintenance.

### **Coding and Modifier Information**

This payment policy references Current Procedural Terminology (CPT®). CPT® is a registered trademark of the American Medical Association. All CPT® codes and descriptions are copyrighted 2024, American Medical Association. All rights reserved. CPT codes and CPT descriptions are from current manuals and those included herein are not intended to be all-inclusive and are included for informational purposes only. Codes referenced in this payment policy are for informational purposes only. Inclusion or exclusion of any codes does not guarantee coverage. Providers should reference the most up-to-date sources of professional coding guidance prior to the submission of claims for reimbursement of covered services.

CPT/HCPCS Code	Descriptor
96360	Intravenous infusion, hydration; initial, 31 minutes to 1 hour
96361	Intravenous infusion, hydration each additional hour

### References

1. *Current Procedural Terminology (CPT®)*, 2024
2. *HCPCS Level II*, 2024
3. Medicare Claims Processing Manual Chapter 12 <https://www.cms.gov/Regulations-andGuidance/Guidance/Manuals/Downloads/clm104c12.pdf>
4. CMS NCCI 2024 Coding Policy Manual Chapter 11  
<https://www.cms.gov/files/document/medicare-ncci-policy-manual-2024-chapter-11.pdf>

Revision History	Revision Date	Approval Date	Effective Date
Converted corporate to local policy.	8/15/20		
Annual Review; Removed clinical and added payment policy in “Important Reminder” section	8/26/22		
Annual Review; dates in references section updated	6/20/23	9/13/23	10/13/23
Annual Review; updated, reference dates and links	05/24	5/28/24	5/28/24
Annual Review; copyright date updated	4/25	4/29/25	4/29/25

### Important Reminder

This payment policy has been developed by appropriately experienced and licensed health care professionals based on a review and consideration of currently available generally accepted standards of medical practice; peer-reviewed medical literature; government agency/program approval status; evidence-based guidelines and positions of leading national health professional organizations; views of physicians practicing in relevant clinical areas affected by this payment policy; and other available clinical information. LHCC makes no representations and accepts no liability with respect to the content of any external information used or relied upon in developing this payment policy. This payment policy is consistent with standards of medical practice current at the time that this payment policy was approved.

The purpose of this payment policy is to provide a guide to medical necessity, which is a component of the guidelines used to assist in making coverage decisions and administering benefits. It does not constitute a contract or guarantee regarding payment or results. Coverage decisions and the administration of benefits are subject to all terms, conditions, exclusions and limitations of the coverage documents (e.g., evidence of coverage, certificate of coverage, policy, contract of insurance, etc.), as well as to state and federal requirements and applicable LHCC administrative policies and procedures.

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