

# Dermatology Coding Alert

## Learn How Easy It Is to Get an NPI Number

### To save yourself time and effort, gather your info before you start

Even though the deadline is fast approaching, you don't need to pay someone else to apply for your practice's National Provider Identifier numbers. Take a look at how easy the process is to do yourself.

**Bottom line:** The Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) requires that all carriers except very small carriers, healthcare clearinghouses, and HIPAA-covered healthcare providers begin using unique National Provider Identifier (NPI) numbers by May 23, 2007.

**Nothing to it:** Before you can comply with this regulation, you have to apply for NPI numbers for your practitioners--and despite what you may have heard, that's an easy process.

"Applying for the new NPI is extremely easy and costs nothing except about 30 minutes of your time, depending on the number of providers you have," says **Laura Bassett, RMM**, office manager for Mid-South Surgeons PLLC in Columbia, Tenn.

Follow these easy steps and accomplish the task in a short time.

### Make Sure You Have the Details

To fill out an NPI application, you'll need the physician's or group's taxonomy code, license number(s), Unique Physician Identification Numbers (UPIN), and Medicare and Medicaid numbers.

"Have all of the information for the provider available in front of you when you begin the process," says **Margaret Fisher, CCS-P, ACS-GI**, business office manager for the Tacoma Digestive Disease Center.

**Remember:** If you're filling out your application online, you won't be able to save your work and go back into the application you started if you need to stop and locate information. You'll have to start over. Make sure you have the following information on-hand before starting the online process:

- Social Security number or IRS tax identification number
- Date of birth
- Country of birth
- State of birth
- Mailing address
- Practice location address and telephone number
- Taxonomy (provider specialty)
- State license information, if needed.

**Tip:** If you bill for more than one physician, you'll need to get an NPI for the group as well as each individual provider.

### Choose Online vs. Paper Applications

Decide whether you're filing online or whether you're going to go the paper route. Either way, you'll file through the National Plan and Provider Enumeration System (NPPES).

**Filing on paper:** You can print a copy from



[www.cms.hhs.gov/NationalProvlidentStand/Downloads/NPIapplication.pdf](http://www.cms.hhs.gov/NationalProvlidentStand/Downloads/NPIapplication.pdf). Once you've filled out the application, you should mail it to the postal address listed at the bottom of the application. Be sure to print legibly and include an original signature from the healthcare provider on the application.

**Filing online:** Visit <https://nppes.cms.hhs.gov/NPPES/Welcome.do> and follow the instructions, including selecting a user name and password. Make sure you write down and keep track of your user name information, watch out that you don't make any typographical errors, and print a copy of each page of the application as you fill it out.

[When you file online, you'll receive an e-mail confirmation that NPPES received the application. "I did four applications in about an hour, submitted them, and within 24 to 48 hours I received an e-mail with the NPI numbers that had been assigned. It is that easy," Bassett says.](#)

### **Don't Rush to Hire Outside Help**

You can hire an outside company to do it for you, but experts suggest that you file the applications yourself. If you have someone in your office who can devote the time to filing the applications, you could save your office hundreds of dollars.

"You do not need a seminar; you do not need to pay anyone else to do it for you," Bassett says. "It really is simple. I know when I first heard about the new NPI number, I thought it was going to be a very tedious process but, boy, was I surprised."