

Internal Medicine Coding Alert

Reader Question: Emergency Debridement

Question: A patient came in on an emergency basis with a second-degree burn on her foot sustained when she dropped a pot of boiling water. We debrided a small amount of tissue and placed a dressing. How should we bill for this service?

Utah Subscriber

Answer: The codes for burn debridements and dressings are in the integumentary section of the CPT manual. The correct code for the encounter you describe is 16020* (Dressings and/or debridement, initial or subsequent; without anesthesia, office or hospital, small). The code descriptor small is the appropriate code for dressing or debriding burns covering less than an entire extremity. This code has zero follow-up days, so you may bill for any subsequent debridements or dressing changes or any follow-up visits to check healing.

If the patient is not a Medicare patient, you could bill 99058 (Office services provided on an emergency basis). You would code the burn as 945.22 (Burn of lower limb[s], blisters, epidermal loss [second degree], foot). You may also want to add the E code, E924.0 (Accident caused by hot substance or object, hot liquids and vapors, including steam).