



# Seventh characters ICD-10-CM codes for injury, poisoning, and consequences of external causes codes

**Date of article:** Sept. 8, 2023

**Sources:** ICD-10-CM Official Guidelines for Coding and Reporting FY 2024, ICD-10-CM Tabular List

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Seventh characters are used in ICD-10-CM in some codes to provide additional information. These characters vary in meaning depending on the code section. When a seventh character is applicable, codes that are missing this character are considered invalid. If a code has only three to five characters and requires a seventh character to be complete, a placeholder X must be used to fill in the empty fourth, fifth, and sixth characters.

This article provides an overview of the seventh-character extensions in chapter 19, "Injury, Poisoning and Certain Other Consequences of External Causes." When assigning seventh-character extensions for episodes of care identified in chapter 19, keep in mind that the character focuses on the patient's condition and the specific circumstance related to the treatment of the condition, not the health care provider being seen.

The majority of categories in chapter 19 have three seventh-character values (with the exception of some fractures) identifying the circumstances of the encounter: A – initial encounter, D – subsequent encounter and S – sequela. Categories for traumatic fractures have additional seventh-character values.

The seventh-character assignment is not based on time but on what care is being provided to the patient during this encounter or admission. While the patient may be seen by a new or different provider over the course of treatment for an injury, assignment of the seventh character is based on whether the patient is undergoing active treatment – not whether the provider is seeing the patient for the first time. The seventh character focuses on the patient's condition and the specific circumstance related to the treatment of the condition, not the health care provider being seen.

This means the "initial" or "subsequent" encounter is based on the patient's course of treatment and not whether it is the patient's first visit with a particular provider. The seventh character for "initial encounter" is not limited to the very first encounter for a new condition but can be used for multiple encounters as long as the patient continues to receive "active treatment" for the condition. Examples of active treatment are:

- Initial treatment of the condition (which may be in the emergency room or at a physician's office or clinic)
- Encounter for surgical treatment of the condition
- Evaluation and continuing treatment by the same or a different physician

When a complication code is reported – such as code T84.50XA Infection and inflammatory reaction due to unspecified internal joint prosthesis, initial encounter – active treatment pertains to the condition that is described by the complication code, even if it is related to an earlier problem. T84.50XA describes active treatment for an infection and inflammatory reaction, even if this new condition is related to the prosthesis that was placed in an earlier encounter.

The seventh character for “subsequent encounter” is to be used for all encounters after the patient has received active treatment of the condition and is receiving routine care for the condition during the healing or recovery phase. Examples of subsequent encounters include:

- Cast change or removal
- X-ray to check the healing status of a fracture
- Removal of external or internal fixation device
- Medication adjustments
- Other aftercare and follow-up visits following active treatment of the injury or condition
- Encounters for rehabilitation with physical and occupational therapy

For aftercare following an injury, the acute injury code should be assigned with the seventh character for subsequent encounter. The aftercare Z codes should not be used for aftercare for conditions such as injuries or poisonings where seventh characters are provided to identify subsequent care. For example, for aftercare of an injury, assign the acute injury code with the seventh character D subsequent encounter.

Seventh character S sequela is for use for complications or conditions that arise as a direct result of a condition, such as scar formation after a burn. A sequela is the residual effect (produced by the condition) after the acute phase of an illness or injury has ended. There is no time limit on when a sequela code can be used. The residual may be apparent early, or it may occur months or years later. Examples of sequelae include scar formation resulting from a burn or a deviated septum after a nasal fracture. When using seventh character S, it is necessary to use both the injury code (sequenced first) that precipitated the sequela and then the code for the sequela itself. The S character is added only to the injury code, not the sequela code, as it identifies the injury responsible for the sequela.

Always refer to the tabular section of ICD-10-CM for each code and then refer back to the category and subcategory levels to determine whether a seventh character is required and what the available options are.



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