

Advance Notification for gastroenterology endoscopy services

Frequently asked questions

Overview

To provide an opportunity for physician education and to allow UnitedHealthcare to collect more data on which providers should be eligible for our previously announced 2024 Gold Card administrative simplification program, we will be implementing an Advance Notification process, rather than prior authorization, for non-screening GI procedures.

Beginning June 1, 2023, UnitedHealthcare will be modifying our process for gastroenterology services. You will be asked to provide advance notification in lieu of prior authorization for gastroenterology endoscopy services for UnitedHealthcare commercial plan members, in accordance with the terms of their benefit plan. Please disregard communications that may reference prior authorization language, as it will take a few weeks for our systems to be updated. Please note that screening colonoscopy procedures are not subject to this advance notification process.

What is Advance Notification?

The Advance Notification process for non-screening GI procedures supports our efforts to ensure access to safe and affordable care. During 2023, we will use the data received through advance notification to accelerate gold carding for eligible physician groups in early 2024. During this period, we will not issue medical necessity denials for procedures that are not aligned with clinical evidence. Additionally, we will not issue administrative denials for failure to submit advance notification. Rather, we will provide you the opportunity to engage in a comprehensive peer-to-peer discussion with a board-certified gastroenterologist around clinical guidelines. This approach also enables us to identify geographies where underutilization of GI procedures presents an opportunity for us to educate our members about the importance of screening colonoscopies and advanced diagnostic GI procedures.

Provider groups who do not submit advance notification during this period will not be considered for the UnitedHealthcare Gold Card program, scheduled to launch in 2024.

Affected procedures: Esophagogastroduodenoscopies (EGD), capsule endoscopies, diagnostic and surveillance colonoscopies. Please note that Screening Colonoscopy procedures are not included in this new Advance Notification process. See more details in the “Important details” section below. Please refer to the most current **CPT® code list** and **CPT Code List and Crosswalk** listed on **UHCprovider.com**.

Affected plans: This notification process applies to patients with UnitedHealthcare commercial plans, including UnitedHealthcare, UnitedHealthcare Plan of the River Valley, Neighborhood Health Partnership, UnitedHealthcare Level Funded and UnitedHealthcare Oxford Health Plans.

Affected states: This notification process affects members in all states, except Rhode Island, Kentucky and New Mexico. Note: This policy is not effective in Iowa until Aug. 1, 2023. This requirement does not pertain to the U.S. territories (U.S. Virgin Islands, Guam and Puerto Rico).

Important details

- We may already require prior authorization for some of these procedures if the planned site of service is scheduled to be performed in an outpatient hospital. However, for dates of service beginning on or after June 1, 2023, we'll require advance notification for these procedures regardless of the outpatient location in which you plan to perform the procedure.
- Screening colonoscopy procedures are not included in this new advance notification process; however, site of service medical necessity review continues to apply if the screening colonoscopy procedure is performed in an outpatient hospital per our current Screening Colonoscopy Procedures – Site of Service – Commercial Medical Policy and Screening Colonoscopy Procedures – Site of Service – Oxford Clinical Policy
- Gastroenterology endoscopy procedures performed in and appropriately billed with the following places of service aren't subject to advance notification requirements: emergency rooms, urgent care centers, hospital observation units and inpatient settings
- We do not require advance notification if we are secondary to a payer including Medicare
- The advance notification is valid for 90 calendar days. We'll use the issue date of the advance notification number as the starting point for the 90-day period. Please submit a new advance notification if you do not complete the procedure within the 90-day period.

Frequently asked questions

Why is UnitedHealthcare requesting advance notification for gastrointestinal endoscopy procedures?

To provide an opportunity for physician education and to allow UnitedHealthcare to collect more data on which providers should be eligible for our previously announced 2024 Gold Card administrative simplification program, we have implemented an Advance Notification process, rather than prior authorization, for non-screening gastroenterology endoscopy procedures.

Clinical studies demonstrate overutilization of these procedures and lack of adherence to specialty society-endorsed guidelines and recommendations.

- Up to one-third of upper GI procedures and almost half of non-screening colonoscopies performed for common clinical conditions are not consistent with clinical guidelines
- A UHC review of upper endoscopy and lower endoscopy procedures performed in 2022 revealed 2- to 5-fold practice-level variation in the use of both procedure types, even after adjusting for member characteristics including age and comorbidities

Endoscopy procedures are important diagnostic tools and are generally considered safe. However, there are reported to be a wide range of complications, including bleeding, bowel perforation and anesthesia-related events such as aspiration pneumonia and heart arrhythmias.

- For UHC members these complications amount to almost 2,500 admissions and almost 6,000 Emergency Department visits annually within 30 days of the procedure

Who will be eligible for the UnitedHealthcare Gold Card program?

Provider practices who consistently adhere to evidence-based guidelines and have sufficient case volumes will be eligible for the UnitedHealthcare Gold Card program, scheduled to launch in early 2024. UnitedHealthcare will provide more details about its Gold Card program later in 2023.

How long of a period of time do you anticipate UHC will request advance notification?

The advance notification process begins in June 2023 and will remain in place until UnitedHealthcare's Gold Card program is launched in early 2024. We have not yet determined whether to pursue additional notification or potential prior authorization for these services for physicians who do not qualify for our Gold Card program.

What types of services require advance notification?

- Please refer to the most current [CPT code list](#)
- The guidelines used for clinical review are available at [Gastroenterology Endoscopy Prior Authorization and Notification | UHCprovider.com](#)
- This process does not apply to services provided in an emergency room, urgent care center, observation unit or inpatient setting
- This process does not apply to members under the age of 18

How do I provide advance notification?

You can submit a request online or by phone:

- **Online:** This preferred option is the most efficient method for providing advance notification. Use the Prior Authorization and Notification tool on [UHCprovider.com](#) by following these steps:
 - Sign in to the [UnitedHealthcare Provider Portal](#) using your One Healthcare ID
 - Select **Radiology, Cardiology, Oncology, Radiation Oncology and Gastroenterology Endoscopy Services Transactions**
 - Enter the required information on the submission site
- **Phone:** Call us at 866-889-8054 (Oxford 877-773-2884), Monday-Friday, 7 a.m.-7 p.m. in all time zones

How do I obtain training on use of UnitedHealthcare's Provider Portal?

If you'd like training on how to submit through the portal, please visit our [Prior Authorization and Notification](#) self-paced course. You may use the Prior Authorization and Benefits tool in the [UnitedHealthcare Provider Portal](#) to verify the member's eligibility and benefit coverage.



How do I provide advance notification for urgent medical conditions?

Advance notification for medically urgent procedures can be provided through the [UnitedHealthcare Provider Portal](#) or by calling UnitedHealthcare and clearly indicating the request is for medically urgent care:

- **United Healthcare: 866-889-8054**
- **United Healthcare Oxford: 877-773-2884**

If you cannot provide advance notification because the service is urgent and provided outside business hours, you may provide notification by phone within 2 business days after the date of service. Please include an explanation of the urgent nature of the service and why it wasn't possible to provide advance notification during our normal business hours.

What information do I need to submit with my advance notification request?

- Member name, date of birth, address and member ID
- Requested procedure(s): EGD and/or capsule endoscopy and/or colonoscopy
- CPT code(s) relevant to the requested procedure(s)
- Referring provider's name, National Provider Identifier (NPI), phone number and fax number
- Rendering facility NPI, phone number and fax number
- If we request clinical information, be prepared to supply the following:
 - Relevant history and physical examination
 - Indication for the specified procedure
 - Relevant summary of the patient's clinical condition
 - Prior treatment regimens
 - Results of prior endoscopic procedures if relevant
 - Imaging and/or pathology and/or laboratory if relevant reports, as indicated, relevant to the requested procedure comorbidities, if applicable
 - Genetic testing results, if applicable

What can I expect after I provide advance notification?

We will not issue medical necessity denials for procedures subject to the program. You do not need to wait for a notification number, approval or a peer-to-peer discussion to take place before scheduling the procedure. The claim will not be denied for failure to meet current clinical guidelines or for not providing sufficient clinical information.

- If sufficient clinical information is provided, you will receive a letter informing you the notification process is complete. The letter will also inform you whether the procedure meets current clinical guidelines. If the procedure does not meet current clinical guidelines, you will receive an offer for a peer-to-peer discussion with a Board-certified gastroenterologist. The member will also receive a letter.

- If insufficient clinical information is provided, you will receive a request for more information. If the information is not provided, you will receive a letter informing you that insufficient information was provided.
- Administrative denials may occur for the same reasons they do today, such as non-eligibility or an incomplete claim submission
- Notification numbers are typically issued within 2 business days or less of receipt of all necessary clinical information

You can use the [UnitedHealthcare Provider Portal](#) to view and print notification information and opt-in to receive email notifications when there is a change to case status.

What if at the time advance notification is provided, I don't know the specific EGD or colonoscopy CPT code(s) that will be performed?

We recognize that providers may not know beforehand what procedures may be performed during the planned endoscopy or colonoscopy. Therefore, we do not require the specific EGD or colonoscopy CPT code(s) at the time advance notification is provided. You may choose a general diagnostic EGD or colonoscopy code, such as CPT 43235 or 45378, or another code that aligns with the anticipated procedure. The notified EGD or colonoscopy advance notification can be applied to claims for services that crosswalk to the original code notified. Refer to the [Gastroenterology CPT Code List and Crosswalk](#).

When can I modify the CPT code for the procedure without contacting UnitedHealthcare?

- If a notification for an EGD code is received and a different EGD code or multiple EGD codes are on the [Gastroenterology CPT Code List and Crosswalk](#), there is no need to contact UnitedHealthcare or provide a new advance notification to modify the procedure
- If a notification for a colonoscopy code is received and a different colonoscopy code or multiple colonoscopy codes on the [Gastroenterology CPT Code List and Crosswalk](#) will be performed, there is no need to contact UnitedHealthcare or provide a new advance notification to modify the procedure
- After the procedure has been performed, you may submit billing for any of the EGD or colonoscopy CPT codes included on the [Gastroenterology CPT Code List and Crosswalk](#). If you provided advance notification for an EGD or colonoscopy procedure that corresponds with the crosswalk table, then the substitution will be applied during claim processing.

When do I need to contact UnitedHealthcare to modify the CPT code before performing the procedure?

You will need to call us at 866-889-8054 (Oxford 877-773-2884) to provide a new advance notification if any of the following applies:

- If you provided notification for an EGD or colonoscopy code and you now intend to perform a capsule endoscopy (or vice versa)
- If you provided notification for a capsule endoscopy and you now intend to perform a different capsule endoscopy code



- If your notified procedure requires a site of service medical necessity review, and the site where your procedure is being performed changes from an ambulatory surgery center (ASC) to an outpatient hospital (OPH)
- If you provided notification for a procedure that does not require site of service medical necessity review, and now you intend to perform a different procedure that does require site of service medical necessity review, please call us at 866-889-8054 (Oxford 877-773-2884) as additional review is required

If I do not provide advance notification, will UnitedHealthcare pay the claim?

Yes, we will pay the claim without advance notification or if insufficient clinical information was provided. We will not issue administrative denials for failure to submit advance notification. However, payment for covered services is contingent upon various factors, including coverage within the member's benefit plan and your participation agreement with us. Payment is also subject to applicable state regulations.

You must submit advance notification to be eligible for UnitedHealthcare's Gold Card program.

Do these gastroenterology endoscopy policies apply to preventive colorectal cancer screening?

No; we have not made any changes to our policies regarding preventive colorectal cancer screening colonoscopies.

The UnitedHealthcare Preventive Care Services policies, available at [Preventive Care Services – Commercial and Individual Exchange Medical Policy](#) and [Preventive Care Services – Oxford Clinical Policy](#), outline the procedure code and diagnosis codes that you should bill when a preventive colorectal cancer screening is performed.

Are the related therapeutic services for a preventive colonoscopy covered under the preventive care benefit?

Yes, related services integral to a colonoscopy are covered under the preventive care services benefit, including: Pre-operative examination, the associated facility, anesthesia, polyp removal (if necessary), pathologist and physician fees. However, the preventive benefit does not include a post-operative examination.

If a polyp is encountered during a preventive screening colonoscopy, are future colonoscopies considered under the preventive care services benefit?

No. If a polyp is removed during a preventive screening colonoscopy, future colonoscopies would normally be considered to be diagnostic because the time intervals between future colonoscopies would be shortened.

Where can I find additional information?

- For more information and reference documents, please visit our resource page at [Gastroenterology Endoscopy Prior Authorization and Notification | UHCprovider.com](#).



Where can I locate the medical policies/clinical guidelines?

You can find all of our medical policies/clinical guidelines on [UHCprovider.com](https://www.uhcprovider.com), including:

- [Gastrointestinal Colonoscopy Procedure Guidelines – Commercial](#)
- [Gastrointestinal Endoscopy Procedure Guidelines – Commercial](#)
- [Capsule Endoscopy Procedures Guidelines – Commercial](#)
- [Screening Colonoscopy Procedures – Site of Service – Commercial Medical Policy](#)
- [Screening Colonoscopy Procedures – Site of Service – Oxford Policy](#)
- [Outpatient Surgical Procedures – Site of Service – Commercial](#)
- [Outpatient Surgical Procedures – Site of Service – Oxford](#)



Questions?

Please contact Provider Services at **877-842-3210**.

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