

This guide is to educate dentists and others in the dental community on this code’s nomenclature and descriptor, used to document these procedures in a patient’s dental record and on a claim submission (ADA Paper Form and 837D HIPAA Standard Electronic Dental Claim Transaction).

Introduction

The current full entry is:

D9110 palliative treatment of dental pain – per visit

Treatment that relieves pain but is not curative; services provided do not have distinct procedure codes.

Questions and Answers

1. What is the ADA’s definition of palliative?

The term is defined in the ADA’s online [Glossary of Dental Clinical Terms | American Dental Association \(ada.org\)](https://www.ada.org/Glossary) –

palliative: Action that relieves pain but is not curative.

The dentist’s clinical judgement determines what would be done to relieve the patient’s pain, which could be localized (e.g., a single tooth or adjacent teeth) or general (e.g., mucositis or stomatitis).

2. If I place an IRM (intermediate restorative material) restoration, do I report this as protective (aka “sedative”) restoration or a palliative procedure?

Delivery and reporting placement of IRM may be reported as **D2940 placement of interim direct restoration** if placement is temporary (e.g., to protect tooth and/or tissue form or to relieve pain) and the patient will subsequently receive an oral evaluation that leads to definitive treatment. **D9110 palliative treatment of dental pain – per visit** would not be appropriate as the descriptor states “services provided do not have distinct procedure codes.”

3. Would the following scenario be appropriately reported as a **D9110** procedure – The doctor treated the patient for a periodontal abscess by debridement and draining of the sulcus and irrigation of the pocket with chlorhexidine.

Reporting code **D9110** would be appropriate if the dentist decides that neither of the following procedures with their own unique codes describe the services provided.

- If drainage was achieved through the periodontal sulcus:
D7510 incision and drainage of abscess – intraoral soft tissue
Involves incision through mucosa, including periodontal origins.
- Irrigation of the abscess:
D4921 gingival irrigation with a medicinal agent – per quadrant

4. When a dentist determines that code **D9110 palliative treatment of dental pain – per visit** procedure appropriately documents the service provided should the claim submission be accompanied by a narrative to describe the exact treatment rendered, even though this is not a “by report” code?

Payer requirements vary and posing the question before the claim is submitted may reduce the likelihood of rejection (or delay) until a supporting narrative is provided.

In all cases the patient’s dental record must clearly document the nature and scope of palliative treatments provided when the patient presents for care. This documentation would be used to provide a narrative report if required for claim adjudication by a third-party payer.

5. Would it be appropriate to report code **D9110** when the dentist simply irrigates an area to flush out trapped food that is irritating the gum line and causing the patient pain?

Yes, reporting code **D9110** is appropriate as the procedure was the irrigation of the food entrapment solely to relieve pain and there are no distinct procedure codes for this service. The full CDT code entry for D9110 does not define the nature and scope of the palliative treatment that enables the patient to gain relief from the discomfort, which is determined by the dentist.

6. May I submit code D0140 limited oral evaluation and D9110 palliative emergency treatment of dental pain on the same date of service?

Yes. CDT codes D0140 and D9110 address discrete procedures that if performed should be documented and reported separately on a claim. However, some benefit plans have limitations or exclusions about paying for certain combinations of codes performed on the same date of service.

Questions or Assistance?

Call 800-621-8099 or send an email to dentalcode@ada.org.