

Acute Respiratory Failure Coding Guidelines

Respiratory failure is a serious medical condition resulting in a patient having trouble breathing on their own. Acute respiratory failure typically results from a critical illness or severe injury, with a sudden onset. Chronic respiratory failure is a long-term problem, which requires ongoing and management care.

Documentation for acute respiratory failure must include:

- A history describing development over a short period of time
- Signs or symptoms of respiratory distress (e.g., shortness of breath, tachypnea or bradypnea, air hunger, supraclavicular/intercostal/subcostal retractions, accessory muscle use, abnormal vital signs and/or findings on lung exam) or end-organ dysfunction from hypoxia/hypercapnia (e.g., restlessness, anxiety, reduced level of consciousness, metabolic encephalopathy, diaphoresis, dysrhythmias)
- A general description including some degree of distress, ill-appearing, or in extremis
- Treatment suggesting the diagnosis is clinically valid and significant (e.g., high-flow oxygen, CPAP, BiPAP, intubation)