

# Identifying Social Determinants of Health via Z code Documentation

## COVID-19 Focused Best Practices

### WHAT ARE Z CODES?

Z codes were first introduced by Medicare as a way to report patient conditions and status that are not classified as disorders. Z codes are used in conjunction with ICD-10 codes to document factors influencing health status and/or the reason the patient is being seen.

Social Determinant of Health Z codes focus on the conditions of a patient's living, learning or work environment that impact their risk and outcomes. Common examples include loss of job, housing issues, physical environment, transportation, food insecurities and more. Using SDoH Z codes will help you accurately depict your patient's health and properly capture risk factors in your documentation. Z codes can be used in any health-care setting, including face-to-face and telemedicine visits.

With the COVID-19 pandemic, many patients and their families are experiencing social determinants that can impact their health and well-being.



**Accurately predict your patient's health**

**Properly capture risk factors**

**Identify Network-wide trends**

By incorporating SDoH Z codes into your notes for billing and coding purposes, you can formally track your patients' social needs and personalize their care. Proper use of Z codes help the NHN measure the overall impact of COVID-19 across the entire patient population and identify the most prominent social needs.

Insurance carriers are beginning to integrate Z codes into their risk stratification analysis and early adoption will help with documentation skills and Z code usage.

### Z code examples ! Common codes related to COVID-19

Z55.1	Schooling unavailable and unattainable
Z55.8	Other problems related to education and literacy
Z56.2	Threat of job loss
Z56.5	Uncongenial work environment (difficult conditions at work)
Z57.3, 39	Occupational exposure to other air contaminants
Z57.8	Occupational exposure to other risk factors
Z59.4	Lack of adequate food
Z59.6	Low income
Z59.8	Other problems related to housing and economic circumstances
Z60.2	Problems related to living alone
Z60.9	Problems related to social environment, unspecified
Z63.7	Other stressful life events affecting family and household
Z63.79	Other stressful life events affecting family and household (anxiety (normal) about sick person in family, health problems within family, ill or disturbed family member, isolated family)



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# Z CODE EXAMPLE

Enhance your documentation with Z code usage to accurately reflect your patient's current health environment to assist in improved patient outcomes.

## ENCOUNTER



**PATIENT: FLORA JOHNSON**  
**AGE: 45 YEARS OLD**

### CURRENT HISTORY:

- Type 2 Diabetes with complications

### REASON FOR VISIT:

- Cough due to seasonal allergy

### DOCUMENTATION NOTE:

Flora comes in today for allergy symptoms that she has been experiencing for the past two days. She currently has good control of her DM2 by continuing to eat healthy and exercise several times a week. Flora seems stressed and voices her concern about possibly losing her job due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Flora has started rationing her medications in an ongoing effort to stay on top of her finances.

## ROUTINE DOCUMENTATION

- E11.9** Type 2 diabetes mellitus without complications
- R05** Cough
- J30.1** Allergic rhinitis due to pollen

VS

## DOCUMENTATION WITH Z CODES

- R05** Cough
- J30.1** Allergic rhinitis due to pollen
- F43.0** Acute stress reaction
- E11.9** Type 2 diabetes mellitus without complications
- Z56.2** Threat of job loss
- Z59.8** Other problems related to housing and economic circumstances

Additional Z codes  
that can be included

**By applying Z codes, the provider captured a more holistic view of Flora's full health story.**

Learn more about Z codes by going to [NebraskaHealthNetwork.com](https://www.NebraskaHealthNetwork.com) and download our Z code Reference Guide.

