

Coding for debridement

by Jenny Jackson, MPH

In the 2011 *Current Procedural Terminology* (CPT)* handbook, the subsection heading “Excision and Debridement” has been revised to refer only to “Debridement.” As a result, codes have been deleted, and new debridement codes have been added. Additionally, the active wound care management and debridement of open fracture codes have been revised to correspond with current clinical practice.

Debridement is a common procedure appearing throughout the CPT book. It is often used to remove foreign material or damaged, dead, or contaminated tissue from a surgical field, wound, or injury. The purpose of debridement is to help promote healthy healing of damaged skin, tissue, muscle, or bone.

When to use a debridement code

The debridement of small amounts of devitalized or granulation tissue during a surgical procedure is typically not billed separately. However, debridement is separately billable when it makes up a significant portion of the procedure.

The debridement codes listed in the table on page 39 do not include repairs, whether done at the same operative session or at a later date. It is appropriate to code separately for an intermediate, complex, or reconstructive repair if performed after a debridement. For example, for debridement of a 20 sq cm injury on the left leg including subcutaneous tissue closed with complex repair, code 13121, 13122, 13122, 13122, and 11042–51.

Depth and surface area

Starting this year, all wound debridements should be reported by depth of tissue removed and by surface area of the wound. Codes 11042, 11043, and 11044, which previously were used to report debridement of subcutaneous tissue, muscle, or bone, respectively, have been revised. These three codes are now used to report de-

bridement of the first 20 sq cm or less of tissue, muscle, or bone. For example, the debridement of a 7.5 sq cm wound on the left hand that includes subcutaneous tissue is coded with 11042.

Three new add-on codes (11045, 11046, 11047) will be used to report each additional 20 sq cm, or part thereof, of subcutaneous tissue, muscle, or bone in conjunction with 11042, 11043, and 11044. When choosing codes to report, keep in mind that the CPT code numbers are out of sequence. The code pairs for the first 20 sq cm and each additional 20 sq cm are: 11042 with 11045, 11043 with 11046, and 11044 with 11047. For example, if the debridement listed above also requires removal of muscle and bone, code 11044.

If debridement of a single wound is required, the deepest level of tissue removed is used to report the service. However, if multiple wound debridements are performed, sum the surface area of those wounds at the same tissue depth, but do not combine sums from different depths.

For example, for the debridement of an 8 sq cm wound on the right hand, 20 sq cm wound on the left thigh, and a 10 sq cm wound on right leg that all include subcutaneous tissue and muscle, code as follows:

- 11043, Debridement, muscle and/or fascia (includes epidermis, dermis, and subcutaneous tissue); first 20 sq cm
- 11046, Debridement, muscle and/or fascia (includes epidermis, dermis, and subcutaneous tissue); each additional 20 sq cm

Active wound care management

Active wound care management codes describe the removal of devitalized and/or necrotic tissue and promote healing. Codes 11040 and 11041, previously used to report debridement of partial or full thickness skin, have been deleted. To report debridement of skin (dermis or epidermis), use the active wound care management codes 97597 and 97598. These codes also have been revised to report the first 20 sq cm or less of total wound surface area (97597) and each additional

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Debridement codes	
CPT code	CPT descriptor
▲ 11010	Debridement including removal of foreign material at the site of an open fracture and/or an open dislocation (eg, excisional debridement); skin and subcutaneous tissues
▲ 11011	Debridement including removal of foreign material at the site of an open fracture and/or an open dislocation (eg, excisional debridement); skin, subcutaneous tissue, muscle fascia, and muscle
▲ 11012	Debridement including removal of foreign material at the site of an open fracture and/or an open dislocation (eg, excisional debridement); skin, subcutaneous tissue, muscle fascia, muscle, and bone
11040	Code deleted. Debridement; skin, partial thickness (See 97597, 97598)
11041	Code deleted. Debridement; skin, full thickness (See 97597, 97598)
▲ 11042	Debridement, subcutaneous tissue (includes epidermis and dermis, if performed); first 20 sq cm or less
●+ 11045	Debridement, subcutaneous tissue (includes epidermis and dermis, if performed); each additional 20 sq cm, or part thereof (List separately in addition to code for primary procedure)
▲ 11043	Debridement, muscle and/or fascia (includes epidermis, dermis, and subcutaneous tissue, if performed); first 20 sq cm or less
●+ 11046	Debridement, muscle and/or fascia (includes epidermis, dermis, and subcutaneous tissue, if performed); each additional 20 sq cm, or part thereof (List separately in addition to code for primary procedure)
▲ 11044	Debridement, bone (includes epidermis, dermis, subcutaneous tissue, muscle and/or fascia, if performed); first 20 sq cm or less
●+ 11047	Debridement, bone (includes epidermis, dermis, subcutaneous tissue, muscle and/or fascia, if performed); each additional 20 sq cm, or part thereof (List separately in addition to code for primary procedure)
▲ 97597	Debridement (eg, high pressure waterjet with/without suction, sharp selective debridement with scissors, scalpel and forceps), open wound, (eg, fibrin, devitalized epidermis and/or dermis, exudate, debris, biofilm), including topical application(s), wound assessment, use of a whirlpool, when performed and instruction(s) for ongoing care, per session, total wound(s) surface area; first 20 sq cm or less
+▲ 97598	Debridement (eg, high pressure waterjet with/without suction, sharp selective debridement with scissors, scalpel and forceps), open wound, (eg, fibrin, devitalized epidermis and/or dermis, exudate, debris, biofilm), including topical application(s), wound assessment, use of a whirlpool, when performed and instruction(s) for ongoing care, per session, total wound(s) surface area; each additional 20 sq cm, or part thereof (List separately in addition to code for primary procedure)
97602	Removal of devitalized tissue from wound(s), non-selective debridement, without anesthesia (eg, wet-to-moist dressings, enzymatic, abrasion), including topical application(s), wound assessment, and instruction(s) for ongoing care, per session
97605	Negative pressure wound therapy (eg, vacuum assisted drainage collection), including topical application(s), wound assessment, and instruction(s) for ongoing care, per session; total wound(s) surface area less than or equal to 50 square centimeters
97606	Negative pressure wound therapy (eg, vacuum assisted drainage collection), including topical application(s), wound assessment, and instruction(s) for ongoing care, per session; total wound(s) surface area greater than 50 square centimeters

● new code; ▲ revised code; + add-on code

20 sq cm, or part thereof, of total wound surface area (97598). References to anesthesia services also were removed because these services can be provided regardless of anesthesia. For example, for an injury to the left leg requiring minimal wound cleaning of a 15 sq cm area of erythematous epidermis, code 97597.

Open fractures

Debridement of an open fracture and/or dislocation is not accurately described with the 11042–11047 codes. Frequently, open fractures have considerable contamination with foreign bodies and devitalized tissue. Codes 11010, 11011, and 11012 were revised to describe debridement including removal of foreign material at the site of an open fracture and/or an open dislocation (excisional debridement).

If the debridement of an open fracture includes only skin and subcutaneous tissue, use code 11010; debridement down to the muscle fascia and muscle, code 11011; and debridement that includes skin, muscle fascia, muscle, and bone, code 11012. Codes 11010–11012 can be used for debridements performed at the same time as the fracture reduction and fixation or for initial debridement and reduction at a later date.

For example, a motorcyclist is struck by a car and sustains an open tibial plateau fracture with significant foreign material contamination and devitalization of the skin, subcutaneous tissues, muscle fascia, muscle, and bone, necessitating debridement. Reduction and fixation are done at the same operative session. These services should be reported as follows:

- 27535, *Open treatment of tibial fracture, proximal (plateau); unicondylar; includes internal fixation, when performed*
- 11012–51, *Debridement open fracture and/or an open dislocation; skin, subcutaneous tissue, muscle fascia, muscle, and bone*

Coding highlight

A young woman presents with multiple wounds from a rollerblading accident. She suffered a grossly contaminated open fracture dislocation of the right thumb, and palmar surface injuries to the left hand and thigh. Her right hand required debridement through the subcutaneous tissue, muscle fascia, and muscle of a 3 cm x 3 cm area with reduction

and internal fixation. Her left hand required debridement down to and including bone of a 3 cm x 2 cm area. Her left thigh required debridement down to and including bone of a 6 cm x 10 cm area.

In this instance, reportable procedures are as follows:

- 26665, *Open treatment of carpometacarpal fracture dislocation, thumb, internal fixation*
- 11011–51, *Debridement open fracture and/or an open dislocation; skin, subcutaneous tissue, muscle fascia, and muscle, right thumb*
- 11044–51, *Debridement, bone, first 20 sq cm, left hand and thigh*
- +11047, *Debridement, bone, each additional 20 sq cm, left hand and thigh*
- +11047, *Debridement, bone, each additional 20 sq cm, left hand and thigh*
- +11047, *Debridement, bone, each additional 20 sq cm, left hand and thigh*

The procedure on her right hand involved debridement of epidermis and muscle with reduction and fixation. Open treatment of the dislocation is reported with the appropriate fracture code, in this case 26665. Code 11011 is used to report debridement of an open fracture and/or dislocation of skin, subcutaneous tissue, muscle fascia, and muscle. The procedures on the left hand involved debridement of bone of a 6 sq cm area. The procedure on her left thigh also includes debridement of bone. Because the procedures on the hand and thigh are debrided to the same depths, the surface area of the wounds are summed. Code 11044 would be reported for the first 20 sq cm and add-on code 11047 would be reported three times for the second 20 sq cm, third 20 sq cm, and the remaining 6 sq cm of the 60 sq cm total wound surface.

Some software edit packages may bundle these debridement codes together; therefore, it may also be appropriate to append modifier 51 (multiple procedure).

If you have any questions or comments on this article, contact Jenny Jackson at jjackson@facs.org or 202-672-1506. If you have additional coding questions, contact the Coding Hotline at 800-227-7911 between 8:00 am and 5:00 pm CST, excluding holidays. [Q]

Ms. Jackson is Practice Affairs Associate, Division of Advocacy and Health Policy, Washington, DC.