

National Provider Identifier Frequently Asked Questions

SECTION I – What do I need to know about NPI?

1. What is the National Provider Identifier (NPI)?

The NPI is a unique identification number for health care providers. Health care providers and all health plans and health care clearinghouses will use NPIs in the administrative and financial standard transactions specified by HIPAA. The NPI replaces the many identifiers you have been assigned by the various payers with which you file claims. See the CMS Web site, <http://www.cms.hhs.gov/> for more information about NPIs.

2. What are the advantages of the NPI?

The advantages of NPI include the following:

- Once you receive your NPI, it is yours for life. You will not need to reapply.
- Payers cannot require you to obtain additional NPIs, so your record keeping will be simpler.
- You will be able to continue to conduct HIPAA standard electronic transactions after May 23, 2007, only under your NPI.

3. What is the format of the NPI?

NPI is a ten-position, all numeric identifier. The tenth position is a check-digit. The NPI will not convey information about the provider, such as the state of the practice, the provider type or specialty.

4. Is BlueCross BlueShield of Tennessee requiring the switch to NPI?

No, this is not a BlueCross BlueShield of Tennessee requirement. Transition to NPI is a Federal requirement of HIPAA Administrative Simplification.

5. Do I qualify for an NPI?

Any provider of medical care qualifies for an NPI. The following are examples of qualifying providers:

- Individual Practitioner or Practice Group – e.g., Physicians, other practitioners, such as chiropractors, nurses, etc.
- Institution – e.g., hospitals, laboratories, nursing homes
- Organization – e.g. home health agencies, [1]
- Supplier – e.g., pharmacies and medical supply companies.

6. Am I required to obtain an NPI?

If you qualify for an NPI and conduct HIPAA standard electronic transactions (see question 14), Federal regulations require that you obtain an NPI and use it in electronic transactions.

7. Will BlueCross BlueShield of Tennessee assign my NPI?

No. BlueCross BlueShield of Tennessee and other health plans do not assign NPIs.

8. I use a clearinghouse to file claims for me. Do I still need to obtain an NPI?

Yes, the requirement to obtain an NPI applies even if you use a clearinghouse to file claims for you. Advise your clearinghouse of your NPI after you receive confirmation of your NPI.

9. How do I obtain an NPI?

CMS is handling the NPI registration process through a vendor (Fox Systems) using the National Plan and Provider Enumeration System (NPPES). The NPI Enumerator (Fox Systems) is responsible for dealing with health plans and providers on issues relating to unique identification. You will need to apply to the NPPES for your NPI. Use the following link to apply online or to print an application:

<https://nppes.cms.hhs.gov/NPPES/Welcome.do>

If you do not want to apply yourself, a professional organization or another covered entity that has obtained authorization may apply on your behalf. For additional information, see http://www.cms.hhs.gov/NationalProviderStand/07_efi.asp.

NPPES will use the information supplied in the application to ensure that each covered entity receives a unique NPI, but will not:

- Link subparts to covered organization health care providers or vice versa
- Capture memberships in groups
- Capture multiple practice location addresses
- Know whether or not a health care provider is a covered entity

10. What is a subpart?

A subpart is a component of a health care organizational provider, such as a hospital or a physician practice group, that is not a legal entity and is not a person. A subpart furnishes health care and might:

- Conduct standard transactions
- Be required by Federal regulations to have a Federal billing number (e.g., Medicare billing number),
- Be certified/licensed separately from the covered organization,
- Have a location different from the covered organization,
- Have a Taxonomy Code different from the covered organization,
- Be a member of a chain.
- Many Medicare Part A providers and DME suppliers are subparts of covered organizations.

11. When does a subpart need its own NPI?

Federal regulations only require subparts to obtain their own NPIs when, if they were a separate legal entity, they would be a covered entity^[12]. Otherwise, they may use the covered organization's NPI to conduct business using HIPAA standard transactions. Although the decision to obtain a unique NPI for a subpart is a business decision made by the covered organization, there may be situations where obtaining an NPI for a subpart is the obvious decision. For example, if a covered entity (such as a hospital) owns a number of home health agencies, each of which has entered into its own contract with Medicare, each home health agency may want its^[13] own NPI. Some other reasons that a covered organization might decide to obtain a unique NPI for a subpart include the following:



- Transactions involving the subpart need to be received into a different account or at a different physical or electronic address.
- Terms of the subpart's contracts with payers differ from those of the covered organization.
- The nature of the services delivered by the subpart is materially different from those delivered by the covered organization.

12. Can health plans require me to obtain an NPI?

Even if Federal regulations do not require that you obtain an NPI, health plans may require you to do so if you are eligible (Question 3). CMS intends to require providers to obtain an NPI as a condition of filing Medicare claims. Private health plan payers may make such requirement as well.

13. If I already have an NPI, can a health plan require that I obtain additional NPIs?

Federal regulations do not permit health plans to require you to obtain additional NPIs. However, you may choose to consider doing so if you are eligible to obtain additional NPIs and if discussions with a health plan indicate that you would benefit from doing so.

14. Will I need a unique NPI when I conduct standard transactions with Medicare or Medicaid and a different NPI when I conduct such transactions with private insurers?

You may use your NPI to conduct standard transactions with any health plan whether Medicare or Medicaid or private insurers.

15. Is there a date by which I must obtain and begin using NPI?

Providers have been permitted to apply for an NPI as of May 23, 2005. By May 23, 2007, you must have and begin using NPI. However, we encourage you to obtain and begin using your NPI as soon as possible to avoid last minute problems that might interrupt your reimbursements.

16. When will BlueCross BlueShield of Tennessee be ready to accept and begin using provider NPIs?

BlueCross BlueShield of Tennessee's timeline for accepting NPI is as follows:

| | |
|--------------|--|
| Jan. 2, 2006 | Accept the NPI, only when the BlueCross BlueShield of Tennessee provider number is on the electronic submission. |
| July 2006 | Begin testing acceptance of NPI only on all transactions with select providers. |
| Oct. 2, 2006 | Allow general testing of transactions with NPI only for all electronic providers. Move to production upon completion of successful testing. BlueCross BlueShield of Tennessee provider number may be submitted on production claims. |
| May 23, 2007 | NPI required on all HIPAA-compliant electronic transactions. |

17. Does BlueCross BlueShield of Tennessee require anything special before I start using my NPI?

Providers may submit his or her NPI now, however, beginning in October, he or she will need to complete testing prior to using only the NPI.

18. What are the HIPAA standard transactions?

The following electronic formats are HIPAA standard transactions:

- 837 Claims
- 835 Remittance Advice
- 207/271 Eligibility Inquiry/Response
- 276/277 Claim Status/Response
- 278 Prior Authorization
- 820 Premium Payment
- 834 Enrollment/Disenrollment

19. Must I conduct HIPAA standard electronic transactions if I have an NPI?

No, having an NPI does not require you to conduct HIPAA standard transactions; but if you choose to conduct standard transactions, you must use your NPI as your identifier.

20. How do I submit the NPI on an electronic claim?

Your vendor or clearinghouse should provide this information to you.

21. I receive 835 payment advices now, and I don't have an NPI. Will I need to do anything to continue receiving them?

Federal regulations require NPI to be implemented on May 23, 2007. As of that date, NPI will be required on all HIPAA standard transactions, including the 835. Even if you have an old request on file with us, it will need to be updated with your NPI to ensure that you continue receiving 835s without interruption. Beginning August 21, 2007, providers may submit NPI to BlueCross BlueShield of Tennessee's Network Services by fax, mail or e-mail.

Fax: (423) 535-7523

Mail: Provider Network Services – 3TC
BlueCross BlueShield of Tennessee
801 Pine Street
Chattanooga, TN 37402-9969

E-mail: PNS.GM@bcbst.com

22. Must I continue to report my tax identifier number (TIN) in standard transactions once I obtain an NPI?

TIN was established by Federal regulation to identify taxpayers. The TIN may be your Social Security Number, Employer Identification Number or the Individual Tax Identification Number. NPI does not replace your TIN, which must be used in standard transactions when required to identify yourself as a taxpayer.

23. What happens if I don't get an NPI?

Your payment may be affected. You will not be able to use standard HIPAA electronic transactions with CMS or other health plans.

24. Will paper claim forms be changed to accommodate the NPI?

For professional claims, the new CMS 1500 (08/05) form will replace the CMS 1500 (12/90) as of April 1, 2007. This new form takes into account the NPI usage requirements.

For institutional claims, the new UB-04 will replace the UB-92 as of May 23, 2007. The UB-04 also accommodates NPI usage.

25. I just received my NPI. Am I done?

Obtaining your NPI is just the start. Now you need to supply BlueCross BlueShield of Tennessee with your NPI(s). See Question 21.

You also need to tell other payers that you do business with as well as your clearinghouse, practice management and other vendors. And there most likely will be testing required to ensure that everything is working correctly. These are important activities you need to complete to ensure that there is no interruption to your cash flow.

26. Where can I get more information about the NPI?

The CMS website has a wide range of information. Go to the following web page and search for "NPI" : <http://www.cms.hhs.gov/>