

Screening for Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) Quick Reference Guide

What are ACEs?

ACEs are stressful or traumatic experiences people have by age 18 that were identified in the landmark Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and Kaiser Permanente (KP) Adverse Childhood Experiences Study. ACEs relate to 10 categories of adversities in three domains: abuse, neglect and/or household dysfunction.

ACE Screening Tools

An ACE screening evaluates children and adults for a history of exposure to 10 categories of adversity during the first 18 years of life:

- Abuse: physical, emotional and sexual abuse
- Neglect: physical and emotional neglect
- Household dysfunction: parental incarceration, mental illness, substance use, parental separation or divorce and intimate partner violence

The following screening tools must be utilized to obtain payment.

Screening Tool*	Age Group	Notes
PEARLS Tool (Pediatric ACEs Screening and Related Life-events Screener)	Children and Adolescents	There are three versions of the tool based on age, reporter and format: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • PEARLS for children ages 0–11, to be completed by a caregiver • PEARLS for adolescents 12–19, to be completed by a caregiver • PEARLS for adolescents 12–19, self-reported Providers receive payment if the adolescent or their caregiver completes the tool. However, the best practice is for both the adolescent and the caregiver to each complete a tool.
ACE Assessment Tool	Adults	If an alternative version of the ACE questionnaire for adults is used, it must contain questions on the 10 original categories of ACEs to qualify.

* PEARLS can be used through age 19, and the ACE tool can be used beginning at age 18. For 18- and 19-year-olds, either tool may be used. For patients 20 years and older, the adolescent self-report version of the PEARLS tool is also acceptable.

Screening Frequency

- **Children and adolescents under age 21:** Permitted for periodic ACE rescreening as determined appropriate and medically necessary — not more than once per year, per provider
- **Adults age 21 up to 65:** Permitted once in their adult lifetime (up to age 65), per provider. Screenings completed while member is under age 21 do not count toward the one screening allowed in their adult lifetime.

Billing Guidelines

Medi-Cal providers are eligible for a **\$29 payment**** for conducting ACE screenings for patients with full-scope Medi-Cal. The following codes must be used to bill based on the results of the screening.

HCPCS Code	Definition	Notes
G9919	Screening performed and positive and provision of recommendations	Patient screening is determined to be “high risk,” a score of 4 or greater
G9920	Screening performed and negative	Patient screening is determined to be “lower risk,” a score between 0–3

**As of July 2020, providers must self-attest to completing certified ACE training on the Department of Health Care Services (DHCS) website (<https://www.medi-cal.ca.gov/TSTA/TSTAattest.aspx>) to continue receiving payments. The certified ACE training available on the ACEs Aware website (www.acesaware.org) is a free two-hour online curriculum and will provide Continuing Medical Education (CME) and Maintenance of Certification (MOC) credits.

Documentation Requirements

Providers must document all of the following and retain the information in the member’s medical record, making it available upon request:

- Tool that was used
- Completed screen was reviewed
- Results of the screen and interpretation of results
- What was discussed with the member and/or family
- Appropriate actions taken