

Your Rights and Protections Against Surprise Medical Bills



When you get emergency care or get treated by an out-of-network provider at an in-network hospital or ambulatory surgical center, you are protected from surprise billing or balance billing.

What is “balance billing” (sometimes called “surprise billing”)?

When you see a doctor or other health care provider, you may owe certain [out-of-pocket costs](#), such as a [copayment](#), [coinsurance](#), and/or a [deductible](#). You may have other costs or have to pay the entire bill if you see a provider or visit a healthcare facility that isn't in your health plan's network.

“Out-of-network” describes providers and facilities that haven't signed a contract with your health plan. Out-of-network providers may be permitted to bill you for the difference between what your plan agreed to pay and the full amount charged for a service. This is called **“balance billing.”** This amount is likely more than in-network costs for the same service and might not count toward your annual out-of-pocket limit.

“Surprise billing” is an unexpected balance bill. This can happen when you can't control who is involved in your care – like when you have an emergency or when you schedule a visit at an in-network facility but are unexpectedly treated by an out-of-network provider.

You are protected from balance billing for:

Emergency services

If you have an emergency medical condition and get emergency services from an out-of-network provider or facility, the most the provider or facility may bill you is your plan's in-network cost-sharing amount (such as copayments and coinsurance). You **can't** be balance billed for these emergency services. This includes services you may get after you're in stable condition, unless you give written consent and give up your protections not to be balance billed for these post-stabilization services.

California law also protects consumers from surprise medical bills and prohibits balance billing when you receive emergency services provided by an out-of-network doctor or hospital. (See a summary of your rights and how to file a complaint below).

Certain services at an in-network hospital or ambulatory surgical center

When you get services from an in-network hospital or ambulatory surgical center, certain providers there may be out-of-network. In these cases, the most those providers may bill you is your plan's in-network cost-sharing amount. This applies to emergency medicine, anesthesia, pathology, radiology, laboratory, neonatology, assistant surgeon, hospitalist, or intensivist services. These providers **can't** balance bill you and may **not** ask you to give up your protections not to be balance billed.

If you get other services at these in-network facilities, out-of-network providers **can't** balance bill you, unless you give written consent and give up your protections.

You're never required to give up your protections from balance billing. You also aren't required to get care out-of-network. You can choose a provider or facility in your plan's network.

California law protects consumers from surprise medical bills and prohibits balance billing when you receive emergency services provided by an out-of-network doctor or hospital. California law also protects consumers from surprise medical bills when they receive non-emergency services at an in-network facility but are treated there by a professional who is out-of-network.

- A summary of your rights if you are covered by a health plan that is regulated by the California Department of Managed Health Care can be found at the following website: <https://www.dmhc.ca.gov/Portals/0/HealthCareInCalifornia/FactSheets/fsab72.pdf>
- A summary of your rights if you are covered by an insurance company that is regulated by the California Department of Insurance can be found at the following website: <https://www.insurance.ca.gov/01-consumers/110-health/60-resources/NoSupriseBills.cfm>

When balance billing isn't allowed, you also have the following protections:

- You are only responsible for paying your share of the cost (like the copayments, coinsurance, and deductibles that you would pay if the provider or facility was in-network). Your health plan will pay out-of-network providers and facilities directly.
- Your health plan generally must:
 - Cover emergency services without requiring you to get approval for services in advance (prior authorization).
 - Cover emergency services by out-of-network providers.
 - Base what you owe the provider or facility (cost-sharing) on what it would pay an in-network provider or facility and show that amount in your explanation of benefits.
 - Count any amount you pay for emergency services or out-of-network services toward your deductible and out-of-pocket limit.

If you believe you've been wrongly billed, please see the contact information below for the appropriate agency to contact.

- If you are covered by a health plan that is regulated by the California Department of Managed Health Care, you can contact the Department of Managed Health Care's Help Center at 1-888-466-2219, or file a complaint at <https://www.dmhc.ca.gov/file-a-complaint/contact-your-health-plan.aspx>.
- If you are covered by an insurance company that is regulated by the California Department of Insurance, you can contact the Department of Insurance's consumer help line at 1-800-927-4357, or file a complaint at <http://www.insurance.ca.gov/01-consumers/101-help/index.cfm>.