

# 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 health care 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 allowed to bill you for the difference between what your plan agreed to pay and the full amount charged by the out-of-network provider for the service. This is called “balance billing.” This amount is likely more than in-network costs for the same service and any amounts you pay may 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 medical condition 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 physician, provider or facility, the most the out-of-network 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 protects enrollees in state-regulated plans from surprise medical bills when an enrollee receives emergency services from a doctor or hospital that is not contracted with the patient's health plan or medical group. In covered circumstances, providers cannot bill consumers more than their in-network cost sharing.

### **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 instances, the most those providers may bill you is your plan's in-network cost-sharing amount. This applies to services like 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 enrollees in state-regulated plans from surprise medical bills when an enrollee receives scheduled care at an in-network facility such as a hospital, lab or imaging center, but services are delivered by an out-of-network provider. In covered circumstances, providers cannot bill consumers more than their in-network cost sharing. Further, for uninsured individuals, hospitals must provide the patient with a written estimate of the amount the hospital will require for the expected services at the time of service.

### **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 from your health plan 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, you may contact Valley Children's Patient Financial Services team at 559-353-7009 for immediate assistance. In addition, you may contact 1-888-466-2219 for enforcement issues related to state regulated plans or 1-800-985-3059 (<https://www.cms.gov/nosurprises/consumers>) for enforcement issues related to federally regulated plans. Visit [www.cms.gov/nosurprises](http://www.cms.gov/nosurprises) for more information about your rights under federal law. Visit [www.HealthHelp.ca.gov](http://www.HealthHelp.ca.gov) for more information about your rights under state law.