



AAVBC

AMERICAN ACADEMY OF VALUE BASED CARE

Severe Asthma

Quick Reference Guide

2026

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1 CLINICAL SNAPSHOT

Definition: Severe asthma is defined as asthma that remains *uncontrolled despite adherence to maximal optimized high-dose inhaled corticosteroid-long-acting beta-agonist (ICS-LABA) therapy* and management of contributory factors, or that requires high-dose ICS-LABA to prevent it from becoming uncontrolled. This is a retrospective diagnosis, established only after at least several months of optimized treatment have confirmed that lower-intensity therapy is insufficient. Severe asthma affects an estimated 3–10% of all individuals with asthma but drives a disproportionate share of morbidity, mortality, and healthcare expenditure — including emergency department visits, hospitalizations, and oral corticosteroid (OCS) dependence with attendant systemic toxicities (osteoporosis, adrenal suppression, hyperglycemia, cataracts).^{1,2}



AAVBC PERSPECTIVE

Severe asthma remains systematically underdocumented in primary care, not from a knowledge gap, but because documentation practices have not kept pace with the evidence supporting severity stratification. Many patients carrying a generic "asthma" diagnosis meet the criteria for severe persistent disease based on symptom burden, exacerbation frequency, and treatment intensity, yet their records do not reflect this complexity. The goal is to help clinicians build a complete clinical picture — symptom frequency, trigger exposure, functional limitation, spirometry trends, and a stepwise treatment record so that disease severity is documented accurately and patients receive the escalation pathways they qualify for.

ICD-10 Codes

J45.50 (Severe persistent asthma)

Common comorbidity codes: J44.1 (COPD with exacerbation), J32.x (chronic sinusitis), J33.x (nasal polyp), E11.x (type 2 DM), M81.0 (osteoporosis), I25.x (ischemic heart disease), I50.x (heart failure), F32.x/F33.x (depression). The unspecified code J45.909 does not map to an HCC — this is the primary documentation gap.³

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