

GENERIC · POWERTRAIN

P038D

OBD-II DIAGNOSTIC TROUBLE CODE (DTC)

P038D

Ignition J Control Signal Circuit/Open

P038D indicates that the powertrain control module has detected an open circuit in the ignition control signal circuit for ignition coil J, meaning the command signal from the computer is not reaching the coil or its control module as expected. The circuit is monitored for continuity and expected voltage or current feedback, and an open condition triggers this generic code.

SYSTEM	CODE TYPE	SEVERITY	FIX DIFFICULTY	AREA
Powertrain	Generic (all makes)	Medium	Intermediate	Ignition system and misfire

Symptoms you may notice

- Illuminated check engine light, often with no other noticeable symptoms
- Engine misfire or rough running, especially under load or acceleration
- Reduced engine power or limp mode in some vehicles
- Hard starting or intermittent no-start condition
- Slight decrease in fuel economy due to incomplete combustion

Common causes, most likely first

- 1 Broken, chafed, or disconnected wire in the ignition coil J control circuit
- 2 Corroded or loose electrical connector at the ignition coil or control module
- 3 Failed ignition coil J (open primary winding)
- 4 Faulty ignition control module or integrated coil driver
- 5 Open circuit inside the powertrain control module driver for coil J
- 6 Damage from rodent chewing or heat exposure on the harness

How to diagnose and fix it

- 1 Perform a visual inspection of the ignition coil J harness and connector for damage, corrosion, or looseness
- 2 Use a scan tool to command coil J on and off while monitoring misfire counters and listening for spark
- 3 Check for battery voltage at the coil connector with the key on and verify the control signal with a noid light or oscilloscope
- 4 Measure resistance of the ignition coil primary and secondary windings and compare to specifications
- 5 Continuity-test the control signal wire from the PCM to the coil, wiggle-testing the harness to find intermittent opens
- 6 If the circuit and coil test good, substitute a known-good coil from another cylinder to see if the code follows
- 7 Repair or replace the faulty wiring, connector, coil, or PCM driver as indicated by the test results



Open circuits that mimic coil failure

- A loose ground strap or corroded engine ground can create an open circuit that sets P038D even when the coil and wiring test fine individually.
- Rodent damage to the ignition harness is a frequent hidden cause, especially on vehicles parked outdoors or in rural areas.
- The code can be set by a failing ignition control module that intermittently drops the signal, so always wiggle-test the harness while monitoring live data.
- Replacing the ignition coil without checking the control circuit continuity often leads to a repeat failure and wasted expense.
- Some vehicles use a shared power feed for multiple coils, so an open in that feed can set codes for several coils, not just J.

Can I keep driving with P038D?

You can usually drive the vehicle short distances to a repair shop, but avoid heavy acceleration or sustained high speeds because a misfire can overheat the catalytic converter. If the engine runs very rough or stalls, stop driving and have it towed.

Tools that help

- OBD-II scan tool with live data and bidirectional control
- Digital multimeter
- Oscilloscope or noid light
- Wire piercing probes and jumper wires
- Factory service information for wiring diagrams and resistance specs

Reading P038D

P	Powertrain: engine, transmission and emissions.
0	Generic (SAE) code: it means the same thing on every OBD-II vehicle.
3	Ignition system and misfire.
8D	The exact fault within that area.

Often seen with

P0300 Random/Multiple Cylinder Misfire Detected · **P0301** Cylinder 1 Misfire Detected · **P0350** Ignition Coil Primary/Secondary Circuit · **P0351** Ignition Coil A Primary/Secondary Circuit Malfunction · **P0352** Ignition Coil B Primary/Secondary Circuit Malfunction



See it working

Watch the animated explainer **Four-Stroke Engine Cutaway: Intake to Exhaust** on Auto Veteran to see the parts involved moving.

Full guide, related articles and animations: <https://www.autoveteran.tech/dtc-codes/p038d/>

