

GENERIC · POWERTRAIN

P038F

OBD-II DIAGNOSTIC TROUBLE CODE (DTC)

P038F

Ignition J Control Signal Circuit High

P038F is a generic OBD-II code that indicates the powertrain control module (PCM) has detected an abnormally high voltage on the ignition control circuit for a specific ignition coil or ignition system output, often labeled 'J' in the manufacturer's naming. The PCM commands a ground pulse to fire the coil, and when the feedback or command line stays at or near battery voltage instead of switching, the circuit is flagged as high.

SYSTEM

Powertrain

CODE TYPE

Generic (all makes)

SEVERITY

Medium

FIX DIFFICULTY

Intermediate

AREA

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 no-start condition if the affected ignition circuit is critical
- Slight decrease in fuel economy due to incomplete combustion

Common causes, most likely first

- 1 Open or damaged ignition coil primary circuit wiring (broken wire, corroded connector)
- 2 Failed ignition coil with an open primary winding
- 3 Faulty ignition control module or igniter (where used)
- 4 PCM driver circuit failure for that specific ignition output
- 5 Poor electrical connection at the coil or PCM connector (loose pin, water intrusion)
- 6 Aftermarket alarm or remote start wiring tapped into the ignition circuit

How to diagnose and fix it

- 1 Inspect the ignition coil connector and wiring for corrosion, chafing, or loose pins, and repair as needed
- 2 Swap the suspected ignition coil with a known-good one from another cylinder and see if the code follows the coil
- 3 Measure resistance of the ignition coil primary and secondary windings and compare to specification
- 4 Check for battery voltage on the coil control circuit with the key on and engine off, then verify the PCM ground pulse with a noid light or oscilloscope
- 5 Back-probe the PCM connector to confirm the control signal is actually reaching the PCM and that the PCM is commanding the ground
- 6 If the circuit and coil test good, diagnose the PCM driver or ignition module as the likely fault
- 7 Clear the code and perform a road test to confirm the repair, monitoring misfire counters if available



What the code does not always mean

- A high signal code often points to an open circuit rather than a short to power, so a broken wire or failed coil primary is more common than a shorted harness.
- Some vehicles use a separate ignition control module that can fail and set this code even when the coil and wiring test perfectly.
- The 'J' designation is manufacturer-specific and may not correspond to cylinder 10; always consult the service manual for the exact circuit.
- A weak battery or poor ground can cause erratic ignition signals that mimic a high circuit fault, so check charging system health first.
- Aftermarket remote starters or alarm systems spliced into ignition wiring frequently cause this code by introducing resistance or opens.

Can I keep driving with P038F?

You can usually drive the vehicle short distances to a repair shop, but avoid heavy acceleration or towing 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 misfire counters
- Digital multimeter
- Oscilloscope or noid light for ignition pulse testing
- Factory service information for wiring diagrams and pinouts
- Basic hand tools and electrical contact cleaner

Reading P038F

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.
8F	The exact fault within that area.

Often seen with

P0300 Random/Multiple Cylinder Misfire Detected · **P0301** Cylinder 1 Misfire Detected · **P0351** Ignition Coil A Primary/Secondary Circuit Malfunction · **P0352** Ignition Coil B Primary/Secondary Circuit Malfunction · **P0353** Ignition Coil C 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/p038f/>

