

Provider Update

Reducing the Overuse of Imaging Studies for Lower Back Pain

Background: Back pain is the second most common symptom-related reason for physician visits, affecting more than 80 percent of adults and responsible for more than \$20 billion in direct health care costs annually. **Clinical guidelines indicate diagnostic imaging is unnecessary for most patients with new-onset lower back pain.**

✦ **What this means to you:** For your information only; no immediate action is necessary.

Claims and encounter data show our providers often order diagnostic imaging studies for patients ages 18 to 50 years who visit an outpatient clinic or Emergency Department (ED) for new-onset lower back pain. The National Committee for Quality Assurance and American Academy of Family Physicians recommend decreasing the number of these studies. **Reducing unnecessary imaging studies saves your practice money and limits patient exposure to radiation.** Help us ensure quality care by decreasing the number of imaging studies ordered except when an exclusion or secondary diagnosis is present.

Guidelines for Diagnostic Studies

- Avoid ordering diagnostic studies in the first six weeks of new-onset back pain in the absence of red flags such as cancer, recent trauma, neurologic impairment or intravenous (IV) drug abuse.
- When ordering an imaging study for a red flag or other reason, use the correct exclusion or secondary diagnosis code.
- If you order a study specifically to diagnose lower back pain, bill using the correct CPT or ICD-9 diagnosis codes.

CPT and ICD-9 Diagnosis Codes for Diagnostic Imaging Studies

Description	CPT Code
Outpatient visit	98925–98929, 98940–98942, 99201–99205, 99211–99215, 99217–99220, 99241–99245, 99341–99345, 99347–99350, 99385, 99386, 99395, 99396, 99401–99404, 99411, 99412, 99420, 99429, 99455, 99456
ED visit	99281–99285
Imaging study	72010, 72020, 72052, 72100, 72110, 72114, 72120, 72131–72133, 72141, 72142, 72146–72149, 72156, 72158, 72200, 72202, 72220
Description	ICD-9 Diagnosis Code
Lower back pain	721.3, 722.10, 722.32, 722.52, 722.93, 724.02, 724.03, 724.2, 724.3, 724.5, 724.6, 724.7X, 738.5, 739.3, 739.4, 846.x, 847.2

ICD-9 Exclusion Codes

Description	ICD-9 Diagnosis Code
Cancer	140.x–209.XX, 230.X–239.X, V10
Trauma	800.xx–839.xx, 850.xx–854.xx, 860.x–869.x, 905.x–909.x, 926.11, 926.12, 929.x, 952.xx, 958.x–959.xx
IV drug abuse	304.0x–304.2x, 304.4x, 305.4x–305.7x
Neurologic impairment	344.60, 729.2

What if I need assistance?

If you have questions about this communication, received this fax in error or need assistance with any other item, call Provider Services at 1-800-454-3730.

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