

To: AmeriHealth Caritas Louisiana Providers

Date: July 24, 2025

Subject: Use of Imaging Studies for Low Back Pain

Summary: Helpful tips for improving provider rates for HEDIS® measure *Use of Imaging Studies for Low Back Pain (LBP)*

Use of Imaging Studies for Low Back Pain (LBP) is a HEDIS® measure defined as “the percentage of adults aged 18-75 with a principal diagnosis of low back pain who did not have an imaging study (plain X-ray, MRI, CT scan) within 28 days of the diagnosis.” The measure indicates whether imaging studies are overused in the evaluation of members presenting with low back pain.

According to the National Committee for Quality Assurance (NCQA), avoiding imaging for patients when there is no indication of an underlying condition can prevent unnecessary harm and unintended consequences to patients, lowering health care costs¹.

The measure is reported as an inverted rate, so higher scores indicate appropriate treatment of low back pain (i.e., the proportion for whom imaging studies did not occur). Rates show the percentage of patients receiving proper treatment, not those receiving potentially unnecessary imaging.

Measure Exclusions:

Patients with the following diagnoses may be excluded from the measure denominator: cancer, recent trauma, neurological impairment, HIV, spinal infection, major organ transplant, intravenous drug abuse, or prolonged use of corticosteroids.

Helpful tips for providers²:

- Unless one of the reasons for exclusion listed above is present, consider alternative treatment options prior to ordering diagnostic imaging studies, such as heat, massage, physical therapy, and exercise to strengthen the core and lower back.
- Educate patients on the potential danger of radiation exposure.
- Assess the patient’s low back pain before recommending an imaging study. Perform a physical examination and identify secondary causes of acute low back pain³.
- Be cautious in the use of opioids in the presence of acute or subacute low back pain. Whenever appropriate, use nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs or skeletal muscle relaxants⁴.

Questions:

Thank you for your continued support and commitment to our members' care. If you have questions about this communication, please contact AmeriHealth Caritas Louisiana's Provider Services department at 1-888-922-0007 or your [Provider Network Management Account Executive](#).

References:

- ¹ <https://www.ncqa.org/report-cards/health-plans/state-of-health-care-quality-report/use-of-imaging-studies-for-low-back-pain-lbp/>
- ² <https://www.hopkinsmedicine.org/johns-hopkins-health-plans/providers-physicians/health-care-performance-measures/hedis/use-imaging-studies-low-back-pain>
- ³ North American Spine Society. 2021. "Evidence-Based Clinical Guidelines for Multidisciplinary Spine Care."
- ⁴ <https://www.niams.nih.gov/health-topics/back-pain/diagnosis-treatment-and-steps-to-take>

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