

**Medical Coverage Policy**

Policy Number – MP23-036E

Original review date – 05/19/2023

Effective date – 09/18/2024

## Imaging for low back pain

**Background**

Imaging for low back pain includes X-ray, Ultrasound, CT scan and MRI.

**Policy statement**

*Disclaimer: This policy is applicable to TRICARE Prime and Select beneficiaries and may not apply to Active Duty Service Members (ADSM) under Supplemental Health Care Program (SHCP) or TRICARE Prime Remote (TPR) in accordance with TRICARE Operations Manual (TOM) Chapter 17, Section 3. Please review TOM Chapter 17, Section 3, Paragraph 2.0 onwards, regarding SHCP coverage and any TRICARE-specific exclusions included in this coverage policy to accurately determine the benefit for ADSMs.*

Imaging for low back pain may be considered medically necessary for the following conditions:

- I. Onset of symptoms occurred greater than six weeks ago
- II. Onset of symptoms occurred less than six weeks ago and one of the following criteria are met (red flags):
  - a. Possible fracture, such as from a major trauma
  - b. Patient has suffered minor trauma and one of the following:
    - i. Patient is older and potentially osteoporotic
    - ii. History of osteoporosis
    - iii. History of chronic steroid use
  - c. Possible tumor, cancer, or infection and one of the following:
    - i. History of cancer
    - ii. History of intravenous drug use
    - iii. Fevers, chills or unexplained weight loss
    - iv. Immune suppression
  - d. Possible cauda equine syndrome, and one of the following:
    - i. Saddle anesthesia (loss of sensation in buttocks, perineum and inner surfaces of the thighs)
    - ii. Bowel or bladder dysfunction
  - e. Major motor weakness
  - f. Progressive neurological symptoms

## TRICARE Policy

TRICARE Policy Manual Chapter 5, Section 1.1

### 5.0 EXCLUSIONS

5.16 Imaging, including x-ray, ultrasound, CT scan, and MRI, for acute low back pain (LBP) within six weeks of the onset of symptoms is excluded in the absence of clinical warning signs (“red flags”) indicating an underlying cause from patient history and/or physical exam. This policy clarification is applicable to claims with dates of service on or after October 30, 2020. Red flags are as follows:

5.16.1 Possible fracture, such as from a major trauma, or a more minor trauma in older or potentially osteoporotic patients; history of osteoporosis; chronic steroid use

5.16.2 Possible tumor, cancer, or infection, as evidenced by: a history of cancer; a history of intravenous drug use; fevers, chills, or unexplained weight loss; or immune suppression

5.16.3 Possible cauda equina syndrome, as evidenced by: bowel or bladder dysfunction; or saddle anesthesia (loss of sensation in the buttocks, perineum, and inner surfaces of the thighs)

5.16.4 Major motor weakness

5.16.5 Progressive neurological symptoms

### Coding information

72020	X-RAY EXAM OF SPINE 1 VIEW
72100	X-RAY EXAM L-S SPINE 2/3 VWS
72110	X-RAY EXAM L-2 SPINE 4/>VWS
72114	X-RAY EXAM L-S SPINE BENDING
72120	X-RAY BEND ONLY L-S SPINE

72131	CT LUMBAR SPINE W/O DYE
72132	CT LUMBAR SPINE W/DYE
72133	CT Lumbar Spine W/O & W/Dye
72148	MRI Lumbar Spine W/O Dye
72149	MRI Lumbar Spine W/Dye
72158	MRI Lumbar Spine W/O & W/Dye
72159	MRI Angio Spine W/O&W/Dye
72200	X-Ray Exam Si Joints
72202	X-Ray Exam Si Joints 3/> Vws
72220	X-Ray Exam Sacrum Tailbone
76800	US Exam Spinal Canal

## References

1. TRICARE Policy Manual Chapter 5, Section 1.1 [TRICARE Manuals - Display Chap 5 Sect 1.1 \(Change 107, Jan 6, 2023\) \(health.mil\)](#)

## Review History

September 2024: No change

Approved by:



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Chief Medical Officer

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