



Medical Policy

Vertebral Fracture Assessment with Densitometry

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Policy Number: 449

BCBSA Reference Number: 6.01.44 (For Plan internal use only)
 NCD/LCD: NA

Related Policies

- Medicare Advantage Management, #[132](#)
- Bone Mineral Density Studies, #[450](#)
- Whole Body Dual X-Ray Absorptiometry to Determine Body Composition, #[577](#)

Policy

Commercial Members: Managed Care (HMO and POS), PPO, and Indemnity Medicare HMO BlueSM and Medicare PPO BlueSM Members

Screening for vertebral fractures using dual x-ray absorptiometry (DEXA or DXA) is [INVESTIGATIONAL](#).

Prior Authorization Information

Inpatient

- For services described in this policy, precertification/preauthorization **IS REQUIRED** for all products if the procedure is performed **inpatient**.

Outpatient

- For services described in this policy, see below for products where prior authorization **might be required** if the procedure is performed **outpatient**.

	Outpatient
Commercial Managed Care (HMO and POS)	This is not a covered service.
Commercial PPO and Indemnity	This is not a covered service.
Medicare HMO Blue SM	This is not a covered service.
Medicare PPO Blue SM	This is not a covered service.

CPT Codes / HCPCS Codes / ICD Codes

Inclusion or exclusion of a code does not constitute or imply member coverage or provider reimbursement. Please refer to the member's contract benefits in effect at the time of service to determine coverage or non-coverage as it applies to an individual member.

Providers should report all services using the most up-to-date industry-standard procedure, revenue, and diagnosis codes, including modifiers where applicable.

The following codes are included below for informational purposes only; this is not an all-inclusive list.

The following CPT code is considered investigational for **Commercial Members: Managed Care (HMO and POS), PPO, and Indemnity:**

CPT Codes

CPT codes:	Code Description
77085	Dual-energy X-ray absorptiometry (DXA), bone density study, 1 or more sites; axial skeleton (eg, hips, pelvis, spine), including vertebral fracture assessment

The following CPT code is considered investigational for **Commercial Members: Managed Care (HMO and POS), PPO, Indemnity, Medicare HMO Blue and Medicare PPO Blue:**

CPT Codes

CPT codes:	Code Description
77086	Vertebral fracture assessment via dual-energy X-ray absorptiometry (DXA)

Description

Diagnosis

Only 20% to 30% of vertebral fractures are recognized clinically; the rest are discovered incidentally on lateral spine radiographs or other imaging studies.¹ Lateral spine radiographs have not been recommended as a component of risk assessment for osteoporosis because of the cost, radiation exposure, and the fact that the radiograph would require a separate procedure in addition to the bone mineral density (BMD) study using dual-energy x-ray absorptiometry (DXA). However, several densitometers with specialized software can perform vertebral fracture assessment (VFA) in conjunction with DXA. The lateral spine scan is performed by using a rotating arm. Depending on the densitometer used, the patient can either stay in the supine position after the bone density study or is required to move to the left decubitus position.

Vertebral fracture assessment differs from radiologic detection of fractures because VFA uses a lower radiation exposure and can detect only fractures, while traditional radiograph images can detect other bone and soft tissue abnormalities in addition to spinal fractures. Manufacturers have also referred to this procedure as instant vertebral assessment, radiographic vertebral assessment, dual-energy vertebral assessment, or lateral vertebral assessment.

For both lateral spine radiographs and images with densitometry, vertebral fractures are assessed visually. A number of grading systems have been proposed, and the Genant semiquantitative method is commonly used. This system grades deformities from I to III, with grade I (mild) representing a 20% to 24% reduction in vertebral height, grade II (moderate) representing a 25% to 39% reduction in height, and grade III (severe) representing a 40% or greater reduction in height. The location of the deformity within the vertebrae may also be noted. For example, if only the mid-height of the vertebrae is affected, the deformity is defined as an endplate deformity; if both the anterior and mid-heights are deformed, it is a wedge deformity; and if the entire vertebrae is deformed, it is classed as a crush deformity. A vertebral deformity of at least 20% loss in height is typically considered a fracture. Accurate interpretation of both lateral spine radiographs and VFA imaging depends on radiologic training. Thus, device location and availability of appropriately trained personnel may influence diagnostic accuracy.

Summary

Description

Vertebral fracture assessment (VFA) with densitometry is a technique to assess vertebral fractures at the same time as bone mineral density (BMD), using additional software with dual-energy x-ray absorptiometry (DXA). The addition of VFA to BMD may augment diagnostic information on fracture risk.

Summary of Evidence

For individuals who are at risk of having vertebral fractures but are not known to have them who receive vertebral fracture assessment (VFA) with densitometry by dual-energy x-ray absorptiometry (DXA), the evidence includes diagnostic accuracy studies and subgroup re-analyses of treatment studies. Relevant outcomes are test accuracy, test validity, and morbid events. There is a lack of direct evidence from screening trials that use of densitometry with VFA improves health outcomes. Because direct evidence was not available, a chain of evidence was sought. Evidence was examined on the diagnostic accuracy of VFA in non-osteoporotic patients (ie, those not already eligible for treatment), the ability of VFA to identify patients for treatment who would not otherwise be identified, and the effectiveness of treatment in this population. Diagnostic accuracy studies have reported variable findings; recent studies have suggested higher diagnostic accuracy of VFA overall compared with standard radiographs than older studies. Studies have found that VFA can identify patients without osteoporosis who may be appropriate candidates for treatment according to recommendations from the Bone Health and Osteoporosis Foundation. However, there is limited evidence on the effectiveness of treatment in this population. No treatment data have been published on patients whose vertebral fractures were identified using VFA software with densitometry. The evidence is insufficient to determine that the technology results in an improvement in the net health outcome.

Policy History

Date	Action
11/2023	Annual policy review. Description, summary, and references updated. Policy statements unchanged.
12/2022	Clarified coding information.
10/2022	Annual policy review. Description, summary, and references updated. Policy statements unchanged.
10/2021	Annual policy review. Description, summary, and references updated. Policy statements unchanged.
11/2020	Annual policy review. Description, summary, and references updated. Policy statements unchanged.
10/2019	Annual policy review. Description, summary, and references updated. Policy statements unchanged.
11/2018	Annual policy review. Description, summary, and references updated. Policy statements unchanged.
10/2017	Annual policy review. New references added.
10/2016	Annual policy review. New references added.
1/2015	Clarified coding information.
2/2013	Annual policy review. New references added.
11/2011-4/2012	Medical policy ICD 10 remediation: Formatting, editing and coding updates. No changes to policy statements.
9/2011	Reviewed - Medical Policy Group - Urology and Obstetrics/Gynecology. No changes to policy statements.
1/2011	Annual policy review. No changes to policy statements.
10/2010	Reviewed - Medical Policy Group - Urology and Obstetrics/Gynecology. No changes to policy statements.
10/2009	Reviewed - Medical Policy Group - Urology and Obstetrics/Gynecology. No changes to policy statements.
10/2008	Reviewed - Medical Policy Group - Urology and Obstetrics/Gynecology. No changes to policy statements.
10/2007	Reviewed - Medical Policy Group - Urology and Obstetrics/Gynecology.

	No changes to policy statements.
8/2007	Annual policy review. No changes to policy statements.

Information Pertaining to All Blue Cross Blue Shield Medical Policies

Click on any of the following terms to access the relevant information:

[Medical Policy Terms of Use](#)

[Managed Care Guidelines](#)

[Indemnity/PPO Guidelines](#)

[Clinical Exception Process](#)

[Medical Technology Assessment Guidelines](#)

References

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