



MASSACHUSETTS

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Medical Policy

Bone Mineral Density Studies

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Policy Number: 450

BCBSA Reference Number: 6.01.01

NCD/LCD: Local Coverage Determination (LCD): Category III CPT® Codes (L33392) (A56195)

Medicare Benefit Policy Manual - Pub 100-02 Medicare Benefit Policy

Related Policies

- Vertebral Fracture Assessment with Densitometry, #[449](#)
- Bone Turnover Markers for Diagnosis and Management of Osteoporosis and Diseases Associated with High Bone Turnover, #[549](#)

Policy

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

Initial or repeat bone mineral density (BMD) measurement is not indicated unless the results will influence treatment decisions.

An initial measurement of central (hip/spine) BMD using dual x-ray absorptiometry may be considered **MEDICALLY NECESSARY** to assess fracture risk and the need for pharmacologic therapy in both women and men who are considered at risk for osteoporosis. BMD testing may be indicated under the following conditions:

- Women age 65 and older, regardless of other risk factors;
- Men age 70 and older, regardless of other risk factors;
- Younger postmenopausal women about whom there is a concern based on their risk factors;
- Men age 50 to 70 about whom there is a concern based on their risk factors;
- Adults with a condition or taking a medication associated with low bone mass or bone loss.

Repeat measurement of central (hip/spine) BMD using dual x-ray absorptiometry for individuals who previously tested normal (does not require pharmacologic treatment) may be considered **MEDICALLY NECESSARY** at an interval not more frequent than every 3 to 5 years; the interval depends on patient risk factors.

Regular (not more frequent than every 2–3 years) serial measurements of central (hip/spine) BMD using dual x-ray absorptiometry to monitor treatment response may be considered **MEDICALLY NECESSARY** when the information will affect treatment decisions such as duration of therapy.

Peripheral BMD testing may be considered **MEDICALLY NECESSARY** when conventional central (hip/spine) DXA screening is not feasible or in the management of hyperparathyroidism, where peripheral DXA at the forearm (ie, radius) is essential for evaluation.

BMD measurement using ultrasound densitometry or dual x-ray absorptiometry of peripheral sites is considered **INVESTIGATIONAL** except as noted above.

Medicare HMO BlueSM and Medicare PPO BlueSM Members

There is no national coverage determination for bone mass measurements (BMMs). Conditions for coverage of bone mass measurements are now contained in chapter 15, section 80.5 of Pub. 100-02, Medicare Benefit Policy Manual. Please refer to this document for coverage information.

Medicare Benefit Policy Manual - Pub 100-02 Medicare Benefit Policy:

<http://www.cms.gov/Regulations-and-Guidance/Guidance/Transmittals/downloads/R70BP.pdf>

CPT code 0508T (Pulse-echo ultrasound bone density measurement resulting in indicator of axial bone mineral density, tibia) is not a covered service.

Medical necessity criteria and coding guidance for **Medicare Advantage members living in Massachusetts** can be found through the link below.

[Local Coverage Determinations \(LCDs\) for National Government Services, Inc.](#)

Local Coverage Determination (LCD): Category III CPT® Codes (L33392) (A56195)

Note: To review the specific LCD, please remember to click “accept” on the CMS licensing agreement at the bottom of the CMS webpage.

For medical necessity criteria and coding guidance for **Medicare Advantage members living outside of Massachusetts**, please see the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services website at <https://www.cms.gov> for information regarding your specific jurisdiction.

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)	Prior authorization is not required .
Commercial PPO and Indemnity	Prior authorization is not required .
Medicare HMO Blue SM	Prior authorization is not required .
Medicare PPO Blue SM	Prior authorization is not required .

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 above **medical necessity criteria MUST** be met for the following codes to be covered for Commercial Members: Managed Care (HMO and POS), PPO, and Indemnity:

CPT Codes

CPT Codes	Code Description
77080	Dual-energy x-ray absorptiometry (DXA) bone density study, 1 or more sites; axial skeleton (e.g., hips, pelvis, spine)
77081	Dual-energy x-ray absorptiometry (DXA) bone density study, 1 or more sites; appendicular skeleton (peripheral) (e.g., radius, wrist, heel)

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

CPT Codes

CPT Codes	Code Description
0508T	Pulse-echo ultrasound bone density measurement resulting in indicator of axial bone mineral density, tibia
76977	Ultrasound bone density measurement and interpretation, peripheral site(s), any method

Description

Bone Mineral Density

Risk factors for fracture include low bone mass, low bone strength, a personal history of fracture as an adult, or a history of fracture in a first-degree relative. Osteoporosis, defined as low bone mass leading to an increased risk of fragility fractures, is an extremely common disease in the elderly population due to age-related bone loss in both sexes and menopause-related bone loss in women. The World Health Organization has diagnostic thresholds for osteoporosis based on BMD measurements compared with a T score, which is the standard deviation difference between an individual's BMD and that of a young adult reference population. Conditions that can cause or contribute to osteoporosis include lifestyle factors such as low intake of calcium, high intake of alcohol or cigarette smoking, and thinness. Other risk factors for osteoporosis include certain endocrine, hematologic, gastrointestinal tract and genetic disorders, hypogonadal states, and medications.

BMD can be measured either centrally (ie, hip or spine) or peripherally (ie, wrist, finger, heel) sites. While BMD measurements are predictive of fragility fractures at all sites, central measurements of the hip and spine are the most predictive. Fractures of the hip and spine (ie, vertebral fractures) are also considered to be the most clinically relevant. BMD is typically expressed as a T score.

The utility of screening BMD measurements can be established by demonstrating that screening identifies a population at increased risk of fracture and that, by treating those at-risk individuals, the rate of fractures is reduced thereby lowering fracture-related morbidity and mortality. These potential benefits of screening should outweigh the risks of screening (radiation exposure) or false-positives (initiation of unnecessary treatment).

Osteoporosis Treatment

Treatment of osteoporosis includes both lifestyle measures (eg, increased intake of calcium and vitamin D, exercise, smoking cessation) and pharmacologic measures. Current pharmacologic options include bisphosphonates such as alendronate (ie, Fosamax), selective estrogen receptor modulators such as raloxifene (ie, Evista), the recombinant human parathyroid hormone teriparatide (ie, Forteo), and

calcitonin. An updated 2014 systematic review funded by the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality found good-quality evidence that bisphosphonates, denosumab, teriparatide, and raloxifene reduce fracture risk in postmenopausal women with BMD in the osteoporotic range and/or preexisting hip or vertebral fracture.¹

The decision to perform a bone density assessment should be based on an individual's fracture risk profile and skeletal health assessment. In addition to age, sex, and BMD, risk factors included in the World Health Organization Fracture Risk Assessment Tool² are:

- Low body mass index;
- Parental history of hip fracture;
- Previous fragility fracture in adult life (ie, occurring spontaneously or a fracture arising from trauma, which, in a healthy individual, would not have resulted in a fracture);
- Current smoking or 3 or more units of alcohol daily, where a unit is equivalent to a standard glass of beer (285 mL), a single measure of spirits (30 mL), a medium-sized glass of wine (120 mL), or 1 measure of an aperitif (60 mL);
- A disorder strongly associated with osteoporosis, which includes rheumatoid arthritis, type I (insulin-dependent) diabetes, osteogenesis imperfecta in adults, untreated long-standing hyperthyroidism, hypogonadism or premature menopause (<45 years), chronic malnutrition or malabsorption, and chronic liver disease;
- Current exposure to oral glucocorticoids or exposure to oral glucocorticoids for more than three months at a dose of prednisolone 5 mg daily or more (or equivalent doses of other glucocorticoids).

Measurement Tools

Available diagnostic tools use either X-rays or ultrasound. X-ray based methods measure BMD. However, studies suggest that in addition to measuring structural aspects of the bone by assessing BMD, other mechanical features and elastic properties of the bone are also important to predict the risk of fractures. X-ray based methods cannot assess these properties and therefore use of alternative methodologies such as ultrasound densitometry and quantitative computed tomography have been explored. The most commonly used technologies are described next.

Dual X-Ray Absorptiometry

DXA is the most commonly used technique to measure BMD because of its ease of use, low radiation exposure, and its ability to measure BMD at both the hip and spine. DXA can also be used to measure peripheral sites, such as the wrist and finger. DXA generates two x-ray beams of different energy levels to scan the region of interest and measures the difference in attenuation as the low- and high-energy beams pass through the bone and soft tissue. The low-energy beam is preferentially attenuated by bone, while the high-energy beam is attenuated by both bone and soft tissue. This difference in attenuation between the two beams allows for correction for the irregular masses of soft tissue, which surround the spine and hip, and therefore the measurement of bone density at those sites.

Quantitative Computed Tomography

Quantitative computed tomography depends on the differential absorption of ionizing radiation by calcified tissue and is used for central measurements only.

Compared with DXA, quantitative computed tomography is less readily available and associated with relatively high radiation exposure and relatively high cost. Analysis of previously obtained clinical computed tomography scans of the pelvis might provide an alternative method of assessing biomechanical bone strength.

Ultrasound Densitometry

Ultrasound densitometry is a technique for measuring BMD at peripheral sites, typically the heel but also the tibia and phalanges. Compared with osteoporotic bone, normal bone demonstrates higher attenuation of the ultrasound wave and is associated with a greater velocity of the wave passing through bone.

Ultrasound densitometry has no radiation exposure, and machines may be purchased for use in an office setting.

Single- and dual-photon absorptiometry and radiographic absorptiometry are now rarely used and may be considered obsolete.

Note: Vertebral fracture assessment with DXA is addressed in policy #[449](#).

Summary

Bone mineral density (BMD) studies can be used to identify individuals with osteoporosis and monitor response to osteoporosis treatment, with the goal of reducing the risk of fracture. Bone density is most commonly evaluated with dual x-ray absorptiometry (DXA); other technologies are available.

For individuals who are eligible for screening of BMD based on risk factor assessment who receive DXA analysis of central sites (hip or spine), the evidence includes systematic reviews of randomized controlled trials and cohort studies. The relevant outcomes are morbid events, functional outcomes, quality of life, hospitalizations, and medication use. Central DXA is the most widely accepted method for measuring BMD and is the reference standard against which other screening tests are evaluated. BMD measurements with central DXA identify individuals at increased risk of fracture, and osteoporosis medications reduce fracture risk in the population identified as osteoporotic by central DXA. Therefore, test results with initial central DXA can be used to guide therapy. The evidence is sufficient to determine that the technology results in a meaningful improvement in the net health outcome.

For individuals without osteoporosis on initial screen who receive repeat DXA analysis of central sites (hip or spine), the evidence includes systematic reviews of large cohort and observational studies. The relevant outcomes are morbid events, functional outcomes, quality of life, hospitalizations, and medication use. Little research has been done on the frequency of BMD monitoring for osteoporosis. The available research has evaluated repeat measurement with central DXA. Evidence on whether repeat measurements add to risk prediction compared with a single measurement is mixed. Although the optimal interval may differ depending on risk factors, current evidence does not support repeat monitoring in patients with BMD on DXA in the normal range. The evidence is insufficient to determine the effects of the technology on health outcomes.

For individuals who are receiving pharmacologic treatment for osteoporosis who receive repeat DXA analysis of central sites (hip or spine), the evidence includes systematic reviews of randomized controlled trials and observational studies. The relevant outcomes are morbid events, functional outcomes, quality of life, hospitalizations, and medication use. There is no high-quality evidence to guide how often to monitor BMD during osteoporosis treatment. Within-person variation in measurement may exceed treatment effects, and fracture risk has been shown to be reduced in some treatment studies in the absence of changes in BMD. Together, these results suggest that frequent (ie, every two years) repeat monitoring has low value. It is unclear whether DXA at the end of the initial five years of therapy is sufficiently accurate to guide subsequent therapy. The evidence is insufficient to determine the effects of the technology on health outcomes.

For individuals who are eligible for screening of BMD based on risk factor assessment who receive ultrasound densitometry, or quantitative computed tomography, or DXA analysis of peripheral sites, the evidence includes observational studies and systematic reviews. The relevant outcomes are morbid events, functional outcomes, quality of life, hospitalizations, and medication use. In comparison with central DXA, other measures of bone health showed area under the curves around 0.80 for the identification of osteoporosis. These technologies are not commonly used for BMD measurements in practice, and no studies have shown that they can select patients who benefit from treatment for osteoporosis. There is little to no evidence on the usefulness of repeat measurement of BMD using these techniques. The evidence is insufficient to determine the effects of the technology on health outcomes.

Policy History

Date	Action
2/2019	BCBSA National medical policy review. Description, summary and references updated. Policy statements unchanged.

7/2018	Clarified coding information.
8/2017	BCBSA National medical policy review. New medically necessary and investigational indications described. Policy statements edited to clarify that central dual x-ray absorptiometry (DXA) is medically necessary and other methods of measurement are investigational. Clarified coding information. Effective 8/1/2017.
1/2016	Added coding language.
5/2015	New references added from BCBSA National medical policy.
5/2014	New references from BCBSA National medical policy.
5/2013	New references from BCBSA National medical policy.
11/2011-4/2012	Medical policy ICD 10 remediation: Formatting, editing and coding updates. No changes to policy statements.
10/2011	Updated to reflect coverage in accordance with National Health Care Reform.
9/2011	Reviewed - Medical Policy Group - Urology and Obstetrics/Gynecology. No changes to policy statements.
1/2011	BCBSA National medical policy review. No changes to policy statements.
10/2010	Reviewed - Medical Policy Group - Urology and Obstetrics/Gynecology. No changes to policy statements.
11/2009	BCBSA National medical policy review. 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	BCBSA National medical 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](#)

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