Medical Policy

Hippotherapy

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Policy Number: 560
BCBSA Reference Number: 8.03.12

Related Policies
- None

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

Hippotherapy is considered INVESTIGATIONAL.

Prior Authorization Information
Pre-service approval is required for all inpatient services for all products. See below for situations where prior authorization may be required or may not be required for outpatient services.
Yes indicates that prior authorization is required.
No indicates that prior authorization is not required.
N/A indicates that this service is primarily performed in an inpatient setting.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Outpatient</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Commercial Managed Care (HMO and POS)</td>
<td>This is not a covered service.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commercial PPO and Indemnity</td>
<td>This is not a covered service.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Medicare HMO BlueSM</td>
<td>This is not a covered service.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Medicare PPO BlueSM</td>
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</tbody>
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CPT Codes / HCPCS Codes / ICD-9 Codes
The following codes are included below for informational purposes. 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 HCPCS code is considered investigational for Commercial Members: Managed Care (HMO and POS), PPO, Indemnity, Medicare HMO Blue and Medicare PPO Blue:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>HCPCS codes:</th>
<th>Code Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>S8940</td>
<td>Equestrian/hippotherapy, per session</td>
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**Description**
Hippotherapy, also referred to as equine movement therapy, describes physical therapy using a horse. Hippotherapy has been proposed as a type of physical therapy for patients with impaired walking or balance.

**Background**
Patients with spastic cerebral palsy frequently have impaired walking ability due to hyperactive tendon reflexes, muscle hypertonias, and increased resistance to increasing velocity of muscle stretch. These abnormalities result in a lack of selective muscle control and poor equilibrium responses. Hippotherapy has been proposed as a technique to decrease the energy requirements and improve walking in patients with cerebral palsy. It is thought that the natural swaying motion of the horse induces a pelvic movement in the rider that simulates human ambulation. In addition, variations in the horse’s movements can also prompt natural equilibrium movements in the rider. Hippotherapy is also being evaluated in patients with multiple sclerosis and developmental disorders such as Down syndrome.

Hippotherapy is a therapeutic intervention that is typically conducted by a physical or occupational therapist and is aimed at improving impaired body function. Therapeutic horseback riding is typically conducted by riding instructors and is more frequently intended as social therapy. It is hoped that the multisensory environment may be beneficial to children with profound social and communication deficits, such as autism spectrum disorder and schizophrenia. When considered together, hippotherapy and therapeutic riding are described as equine-assisted activities and therapies. This policy addresses equine-assisted activities that focus on improving physical functions such as balance and gait.

Simulated hippotherapy using a new device has been studied in European centers. Therapeutic interventions using such a device would be conducted in the physical/occupational therapy setting and are outside the scope of this policy.

**Summary**
Literature on hippotherapy is limited, primarily consisting of uncontrolled case series and small controlled trials from outside the U.S. In the largest randomized trial conducted to date (72 children), hippotherapy was found to have no clinically significant impact on children with cerebral palsy. Hippotherapy for other indications has been compared primarily with no intervention and has not been shown to be more effective than other active therapies. The literature at this time does not support the conclusion that hippotherapy is as effective as the existing alternatives and does not demonstrate improvement in net health outcome. Therefore, the treatment is considered investigational.

**Policy History**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
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<tr>
<td>4/2016</td>
<td>New references added from BCBSA National medical policy.</td>
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<tr>
<td>12/2014</td>
<td>New references added from BCBSA National medical policy.</td>
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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


