



# Use of Imaging Studies for Low Back Pain

Wellcare wants to help your practice provide optimum care to members and increase HEDIS®<sup>1</sup> rates. This tip sheet outlines key details of the Use of Imaging Studies for Low Back Pain (LBP) HEDIS measure, its codes and documentation guidelines.



**Measure<sup>2</sup>**

The percentage of members ages 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.

This measure is reported as an inverted rate. A higher score indicates appropriate treatment of low back pain (i.e., the proportion for whom imaging studies did not occur).

**Eligible population<sup>2</sup>**

<b>Age</b>	18 years, as of January 1 of the measurement year to 75 years as of December 31 of the measurement year. The rate is reported in two age stratifications, (18-64 and 65-75) and as a total rate.
<b>Intake period</b>	January 1 through December 31 of the measurement year. The intake period is used to identify the first eligible encounter with a principal diagnosis of low back pain.
<b>Episode date (anchor date)</b>	The earliest date of service for an eligible encounter during the intake period with a principal diagnosis of low back pain.
<b>Product lines</b>	Commercial, Medi-Cal, Medicare

**Best practice tips**

- Educate the patient about the reason imaging tests are not warranted.
- Educate patients about ways to treat symptoms and prevent reinjury:
  - Avoid bed rest, lifting heavy objects, twisting and bending.
  - Use heat/ice.
  - Use non-narcotic pain relievers.
  - Remain active.
- Avoid opioids to treat common low back pain.
- If appropriate, encourage light walking and complementary care therapies such as massage, chiropractic care, acupuncture and/or refer to physical therapy.

**For member visits where the following events are in evidence, the member would be excluded from the measure. HEDIS exclusions to the LBP measure are shown in the chart below.**

	When	Event
<b>Exclusions<sup>2</sup></b>	At any time in the patient’s history through 28 days after the episode date.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• History of HIV</li> <li>• History of cancer</li> <li>• Lumbar surgery</li> <li>• Osteoporosis therapy or a dispensed prescription to treat osteoporosis</li> <li>• Spondylopathy</li> </ul>
	Any time during the measurement year.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Death</li> <li>• Receiving palliative care</li> <li>• Using hospice services</li> </ul>
	Within the last 12 months prior to the episode date through 28 days after the episode date.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• History of intravenous drug abuse</li> <li>• Major organ transplant</li> <li>• Neurologic impairment</li> <li>• Spinal infection</li> </ul>
	During 90 days prior to the episode date through 28 days after the episode date.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fragility fracture</li> <li>• Recent trauma</li> </ul>
	For 90 consecutive days any time during the 366 days prior to and including the episode date.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Prolonged use of corticosteroids. Corticosteroid medication list:<sup>2</sup> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Hydrocortisone</li> <li>- Cortisone</li> <li>- Prednisone</li> <li>- Prednisolone</li> <li>- Methylprednisolone</li> <li>- Triamcinolone</li> <li>- Dexamethasone</li> <li>- Betamethasone/betamethasone acetate</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
	As of December 31 of the measurement year with frailty and advanced illness.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ages 66 and older</li> </ul>

**For more information**

- Refer to the latest NCQA Quality Rating System (QRS) HEDIS Value Set Directory<sup>3</sup> for a complete list of diagnosis codes for low back pain.
- Visit the National Institutes of Health Value Set Authority Center at [vsac.nlm.nih.gov/welcome](https://vsac.nlm.nih.gov/welcome) or scan this QR code:



<sup>1</sup>Healthcare Effectiveness Data and Information Set (HEDIS).

<sup>2</sup>National Committee for Quality Assurance (NCQA) HEDIS Measurement Year 2023 Volume 2: Technical Specifications for Health Plans, Washington, D.C., 2022.

<sup>3</sup>NCQA HEDIS Measurement Year 2023 Volume 2 Value Set Directory, Washington, D.C., 2023.