

Specifications for Lumbar Spine Imaging for Low Back Pain Measure

- **Measure Concept:** This measure evaluates the number of magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) or computed tomography (CT) lumbar spine studies for patients with low-back pain for which antecedent conservative therapy was not attempted prior to performing the scan.
- **Measure Interpretation:** Higher values (that is, those toward the high end of the percentile distribution) may indicate that facilities are performing unnecessary MRI or CT studies.
- **Initial Patient Population:** The initial patient population refers to all beneficiaries evaluated by a specific measure. These beneficiaries share a common set of characteristics that make them eligible for inclusion in the measure, including having a specific procedure, being of a certain age, or having some other commonality.

For the *Lumbar Spine Imaging for Low Back Pain* measure, the initial patient population includes those beneficiaries with claims for evaluation and management (E&M) visits, including physical therapy and chiropractic encounters, which contain a diagnosis of uncomplicated low-back pain and occur during the measurement period.

- **Numerator:** A measurement of the process or outcome expected for each patient, procedure, or other unit of measurement defined in the denominator.

For the *Lumbar Spine Imaging for Low Back Pain* measure, the numerator contains MRI and CT lumbar spine studies performed within 28 days of an E&M claim with a diagnosis of uncomplicated low-back pain.

- **Denominator:** The denominator can be the same as the initial patient population or a subset of the initial patient population. The denominator contains all the beneficiaries or procedures assigned to each facility during the measurement period.

For the *Lumbar Spine Imaging for Low Back Pain* measure, the denominator includes E&M claims with diagnoses of uncomplicated low-back pain.

- **Denominator Exclusions:** Denominator exclusions are used to identify beneficiaries who should be removed from the measure population before determining if the numerator criteria are met.

For the *Lumbar Spine Imaging for Low Back Pain* measure, beneficiaries are excluded from the denominator if they had a history of one or more of the following conditions:

- Elderly individuals (at the time of the encounter – age threshold TBD);
- Cancer (with a look-back period of five years);
- Congenital spine and spinal cord malformations (with a look-back period of five years);

- Human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) (with a look-back period of 12 months);
- Infectious conditions (with a look-back period of one year);
- Inflammatory and autoimmune disorders (with a look-back period of five years);
- Intraspinal abscess (on the MRI claim);
- Intravenous (IV) drug abuse (with a look-back period of 12 months);
- Kidney transplant (with a look-back period of five years);
- Lumbar spine surgery (with a look-back period of five years);
- Neoplastic abnormalities (with a look-back period of five years);
- Neurologic impairment (with a look-back period of 12 months);
- Post-operative fluid collections and soft tissue changes (with a look-back period of 12 months);
- Spinal abnormalities associated with scoliosis (with a look-back period of five years);
- Spinal cord infarctions (with a look-back period of 12 months);
- Spinal vascular malformations (with a look-back period of five years);
- Syringohydromyelia (with a look-back period of five years);
- Trauma (with a look-back period of 45 days);
- Treatment fields for radiation therapy (with a look-back period of five years); and
- Unspecified immune deficiencies (with a look-back period of 12 months).

Patients with attempted prior antecedent conservative therapy are also excluded from the denominator and identified by: claim(s) for physical therapy encounters, claim(s) for chiropractic encounters, or E&M claim(s) with low-back pain 60 days preceding the index denominator study.