

May 2024

## Federal Employee Program Use of Imaging Studies for Low Back Pain (LBP)

Florida Blue patients (ages 18 to 75) insured under the Blue Cross and Blue Shield Federal Employee Program<sup>®</sup> (FEP) will receive low back pain educational materials this month via email. The materials include information on common low back pain myths, what to do when experiencing back pain, and when to seek medical treatment from a provider.

### Why It Matters

According to the National Committee for Quality Assurance, low back pain-related conditions account for approximately 2.63 million ER visits in the U.S. each year. About 75-85% of Americans will experience low back pain at some time in their lives. Evidence shows routine imaging (X-rays, MRIs, CT scans) for low back pain is not always associated with improved outcomes. In addition to increased health care costs, imaging exposes patients to strong magnetic fields and increased amounts of radiation. Therefore, we encourage providers to only order imaging when necessary.

**By working together, we can improve health outcomes for your patients, our members.**

### How You Can Help

- Unless medically required, avoid ordering imaging studies (X-rays, MRIs, CT scans) within 28 days of the diagnosis of uncomplicated low back pain.
- Educate patients that imaging tests (X-rays, MRIs, CT scans) do not result in faster recoveries and could lead to unnecessary treatments, surgeries, and additional out-of-pocket costs.
- Encourage the use of conservative measures first:
  - Ice and heat
  - Stretching and exercise
  - Anti-inflammatory medicine and topicals
  - Physical therapy or chiropractic care
  - Healthy, nutrient-filled diets
- Submit timely claims and encounter data.
- Use appropriate exclusion codes where necessary. For example:
  - **G89.11** – Document this code on the claim when members have history of acute trauma or injury within the last 90 days.
  - **R26.2** – Document this code on the claim when a member complains of difficulty with walking due to low back pain.
  - **Z86.03** – Document this code on the claim when a member has a personal history of cancer or uncertain behavior if you have concerns for metastasis or complications due to that history.

If your patients have questions about their benefits and claims, they may contact our Customer Service team for help at 1-800-333-2227 (TTY users, call 711). We are available Monday-Thursday from 8 a.m. - 6 p.m. and Friday from 9 a.m. to noon Eastern Time. Members may also visit [FEPblue.org](http://FEPblue.org) for more information.

To reference the Use of Imaging Studies for Low Back Pain (LBP) Healthcare Effectiveness Data and Information Set (HEDIS<sup>®1</sup>) quality measure tip sheet for FEP members, click [here](#) or visit [FloridaBlue.com](http://FloridaBlue.com). Select **For Providers**, navigate to **Programs**, then **Quality Programs: HEDIS & PQA**.

<sup>1</sup>HEDIS is a registered trademark of the National Committee for Quality Assurance (NCQA).  
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