

June 2025

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

The Blue Cross and Blue Shield Federal Employee Program® (FEP) is dedicated to promoting Healthcare Effectiveness Data and Information Set (HEDIS®<sup>1</sup>) measures, to help improve health outcomes for your patients, our members. Understanding the HEDIS measure on the **Use of Imaging Studies for Low Back Pain (LBP)** is important to reduce unnecessary imaging for your patients.

The LBP measure assesses members ages 18 to 75 who have a primary/principal diagnosis (first diagnosis on the claim) of uncomplicated low back pain, who did not have an imaging study (X-ray, CT scans, MRIs) within 28 days of diagnosis.

### Why It Matters

Evidence shows unnecessary or routine imaging (X-ray, MRI, CT scans) for low back pain is not associated with improved outcomes and leads to avoidable radiation exposure. For most individuals who experience severe low back pain, pain improves within the first two weeks of onset. Avoiding imaging when there is no indication of an underlying condition can prevent harmful and unintended consequences to patients. It can also reduce health care costs.

### How You Can Help

- Unless medically required, avoid ordering imaging studies (X-rays, CT scans, MRIs) within 28 days of the diagnosis of uncomplicated low back pain.
- Help patients understand imaging tests (X-rays, CT scans, MRIs) do not result in faster recoveries and can lead to unnecessary treatments, surgery, and additional out-of-pocket costs.
- Encourage the use of conservative measures first:
  - Ice and heat
  - Stretching and exercise
  - Anti-inflammatory and topical medicine
  - Physical therapy or chiropractic care
  - Healthy and nutrient filled diets

### How to Improve Your Scores

- Avoid ordering imaging within 28 days of diagnosis when not medically necessary.
- Submit timely claims and encounter data.
- Use appropriate exclusion codes as needed. 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.

<sup>1</sup>The Healthcare Effectiveness Data and Information Set (HEDIS®) is a registered trademark of NCQA.

## Important Notes

- The LBP measurement year is January 1, 2025 – December 3, 2025.
- This measure is reported as an inverted rate, which means a higher score indicates appropriate treatment of low back pain (i.e., the proportion for whom imaging studies did not occur).

If you have questions regarding copays, emergency care services, locations, or more, please refer to the Blue Cross and Blue Shield Service Benefit Plan brochure or contact Customer Service at **1-800-333-2227**. Members may call the **FEP Nurse Line** at **1-888-258-3432** for support. Visit [FEPblue.org](https://www.fepblue.org) for more information.

Thank you for your ongoing dedication to deliver high-quality care to your patients. Together, we can help patients get the support they need to navigate their health care journey.

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