Overview

This Coverage Policy addresses the medical necessity of a hospital-based imaging department or facility for the following high-tech imaging services: magnetic resonance imaging (MRI), magnetic resonance angiography (MRA), computed tomography (CT), and computed tomography angiography (CTA).

Coverage Policy

A high-tech imaging service (i.e. MRI/MRA/CT/CTA) must meet applicable medical necessity criteria for coverage. When coverage criteria are met for the requesting imaging procedure, this coverage policy is used to help determine the medical necessity of the requested site of care.

A high-tech imaging procedure in a hospital-based imaging department or facility is considered medically necessary for an individual with ANY of the following indications:

- less than 10 years of age
- requires obstetrical observation
- requires perinatology services

Related Coverage Resources

eviCore High-tech Radiology (Imaging) guidelines
imaging related to transplantation services at an approved transplantation facility
known contrast allergy and use of that contrast agent is planned
there are no other appropriate alternative sites for the individual to undergo the imaging procedure for any of the following reasons:
  ➢ surgery or procedure is being performed at the hospital and pre-operative or pre-procedure imaging is an integral component of the procedure
  ➢ moderate or deep sedation or general anesthesia is required for the imaging procedure and freestanding facility providing such sedation is not available
  ➢ equipment for the size of the individual is only available at a hospital-based imaging facility
  ➢ individual has a documented diagnosis of claustrophobia requiring open magnetic resonance imaging which is not available in a freestanding facility; or
  ➢ imaging outside the hospital-based imaging department or facility is expected to adversely impact or delay care.

All other high-tech radiology (imaging) procedures at a hospital-based imaging department or facility are considered not medically necessary.

General Background

‘Site of Care’ refers to the location where a procedure or scan is performed. In general, non-emergent high-tech radiology (imaging) procedures/scans including magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) and computed tomography (CT) may be performed at either a freestanding imaging facility or a hospital-based imaging department/facility. Freestanding imaging facilities may offer Cigna members a lower cost alternative than a hospital-based imaging department or facility for medically necessary non-emergent imaging procedures.

Imaging procedures may appropriately be performed at freestanding imaging facility for individuals whose health status does not necessitate the availability of a higher-level of supportive care for the minimization of the risks associated adverse health events. Certain high-risk medical conditions can necessitate the need for an anesthesiologist to be present during the advanced radiologic imaging for certain individuals.

Professional Societies/Organizations

The American Society of Anesthesiologists (ASA) Practice Advisory on Anesthetic Care for Magnetic Resonance Imaging (2015) states that risks related to the patient may include age-related risks, health-related risks, and risks from foreign bodies located in or on the patient or implanted ferromagnetic items.

  • Age-related risks apply to neonates or premature infants and elderly patients.
  • Health-related risks include, but are not limited to:
    ➢ need for intensive or critical care
    ➢ impaired respiratory function (e.g., tonsillar hypertrophy and sleep apnea)
    ➢ changes in level of sedation, muscle relaxation, or ventilation
    ➢ hemodynamic instability and vasoactive infusion requirements
    ➢ comorbidities that may contribute to adverse MRI effects (e.g., burns or temperature increases in patients with obesity or peripheral vascular disease)
  • Foreign bodies include nonmedical ferromagnetic items imbedded in the patient (e.g., eyeliner tattoos and metallic intraocular fragments) or attached to the patient (e.g., pierced jewelry and magnetic dental keepers). Implanted ferromagnetic items may include items such as aneurysm clips, prosthetic heart valves, or coronary arterial stents.

The American College of Radiology (ACR) Practice Parameter for the Use of Intravascular Contrast Media (2017) states that appropriate emergency equipment and medications must be immediately available to treat adverse events related to contrast media administration, including equipment, medications, and other emergency support appropriate for the range of ages and/or sizes in the patient population.
The American Society of Anesthesiologists (ASA) Statement on Practice Recommendations for Pediatric Anesthesia (Reaffirmed October 26, 2016) states that radiology services should be contemporaneously available when pediatric patients are receiving care at the facility.

The American College of Obstetrics and Gynecology (ACOG) Committee Opinion (Number 723, October 2017) Guidelines for Diagnostic Imaging During Pregnancy and Lactation states “Ultrasonography and magnetic resonance imaging are not associated with risk and are the imaging techniques of choice for the pregnant patient, but they should be used prudently and only when use is expected to answer a relevant clinical question or otherwise provide medical benefit to the patient. With few exceptions, radiation exposure through radiography, computed tomography scan, or nuclear medicine imaging techniques is at a dose much lower than the exposure associated with fetal harm. If these techniques are necessary in addition to ultrasonography or magnetic resonance imaging or are more readily available for the diagnosis in question, they should not be withheld from a pregnant patient. Breastfeeding should not be interrupted after gadolinium administration.”

Coding/Billing Information

This Coverage Policy addresses the medical necessity of a hospital-based imaging department or facility for the following high-tech imaging services: magnetic resonance imaging (MRI), magnetic resonance angiography (MRA), computed tomography (CT), and computed tomography angiography (CTA).

Cigna – Prior Authorization Procedure List: Radiology & Cardiology

References