



One of a series of tip sheets that look at key Healthcare Effectiveness Data and Information Set measures

Use of imaging studies for low back pain

This measure examines the percentage of patients ages 18-50 years old who have a new primary diagnosis of low back pain and did not receive an imaging study within 28 days of diagnosis. Imaging studies include:

- X-ray
- CT scan
- MRI

Improving HEDIS® scores*

Avoid ordering diagnostic studies in the first six weeks of new-onset back pain unless certain "red flags" are present.

Exclusions* include members with:

- Previous diagnosis of low back pain (within prior six months)
- History of cancer
- Recent trauma within last 3 months
- History of intravenous drug abuse within last 12 months
- Severe or progressive neurologic impairment anytime in last 12 months
- History of HIV
- History of organ transplant
- Prolonged use of corticosteroids defined as 90 consecutive days in last 12 months
- Members in hospice

Did you know?

- In a 3-month period, more than one fourth of U.S. adults experience at least 1 day of back pain.
- Imaging studies done less than six weeks after the onset of low back pain rarely improve outcomes but do increase cost and radiation exposure.

Managing acute low back pain

- Stay active as tolerated by pain
- Avoid bed rest
- Counsel on injury prevention and safe back exercises
- Use over the counter pain relievers

Tip:

If ordering an imaging study prior to six weeks of the onset of back pain and an exclusion applies, be sure to code the exclusion in addition to the diagnoses of low back pain.

*HEDIS, which stands for Healthcare Effectiveness Data and Information Set, is a registered trademark of the National Committee for Quality Assurance.