



# BlueCross BlueShield of Vermont

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## Hippotherapy and Recreational Therapy

### Corporate Medical Policy

**File name:** Hippotherapy and Recreational Therapy

**File code:** UM.REHAB.08

**Origination:** 07/2011

**Last Review:** 09/2012

**Next Review:** 08/2013

**Effective Date:** 10/01/2012

#### Document Precedence

BCBSVT Medical Policies are developed to provide guidance for members and providers regarding coverage in accordance with all terms, conditions and limitations of the subscriber contract. Benefit determinations are based in all cases on the applicable contract language. To the extent that there may be any conflict between Medical Policy and contract language, the contract language takes precedence.

#### Description

Some practitioners may recommend certain types of physical activity, such as various sports and recreation, to improve strength, balance, coordination, and muscle tone. Such activities may include, but are not limited to, aerobics, weight training, swimming, golf, and horseback riding "hippotherapy".

#### Policy

Recreational activity as physical therapy is considered not medically necessary, as it does not meet all of the criteria for physical therapy services as outlined in the Policy Guidelines, and is not generally recognized as an appropriate therapeutic intervention by the American Physical Therapy Association. (See BCBSVT policy on Physical Therapy)

Hippotherapy/equine therapy as a form of therapeutic exercise for individuals with neuromuscular handicaps (such as cerebral palsy, muscular dystrophy or multiple sclerosis) or behavioral and psychiatric disorders (autism spectrum disorders), or for any other diagnosis, is considered **experimental / investigational**.

### **When service or procedure is covered**

Recreational activity as physical therapy is considered not medically necessary and therefore not covered.

Hippotherapy is NOT covered for any condition as it is considered experimental/investigational.

### **Benefit Application**

Federal Employee Program (FEP) members may have different benefits that apply. For further information please contact FEP customer service or refer to the FEP plan brochure.

### **When service or procedure is not covered**

Recreational activity as physical therapy is considered not medically necessary and therefore not covered.

Hippotherapy is not covered for any condition as it is considered experimental/investigational.

### **Billing and Coding/Physician Documentation Information**

#### CPT Coding and Policy Instructions

Code Type	Number	Brief Description	Policy Instructions
<b>These services will deny as Not Medically Necessary for all diagnosis. These codes should NOT be used for Hippotherapy or Recreational Therapy</b>			
CPT	97039	Unlisted modality, (specify type and time if constant attendance)	
CPT	97139	Unlisted therapeutic procedure (specify)	
CPT	97799	Unlisted physical medicine/rehabilitation service or procedure	
<b>The following codes will be denied as Investigational for all diagnosis</b>			

HCPCS	S8940	Equestrian / hippotherapy, per session	
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## Eligible Providers

Not Applicable

## Related Policies

Physical Therapy

Occupational Therapy

Autism Spectrum Disorder, Coverage of Services

Early Childhood Developmental Disorders

## Audit Information

BCBSVT reserves the right to conduct audits on any provider and/or facility to ensure compliance with the guidelines stated in the medical policy. If an audit identifies instances of non-compliance with this medical policy, BCBSVT reserves the right to recoup all non-compliant payments.

## Policy Implementation/Update information

New Policy 07/2011

Revised: 08/2012- Added “Document Precedence” section. Updated “Related Policies” section to reflect ECDD medical policy. Minor format changes. Cross referenced all CPT/HCPCS codes to ECDD medical policy, revised/added new coding table. Added “Audit Information” section. Deleted Dr. Sculimbrene’s name, added Dr. Borden’s name. RLJ.

## Scientific Background and Reference Resources

A search of the peer-reviewed literature was performed from August 2006 through July 2011. Therapeutic horseback riding has been proposed for improving muscle tone, postural and head control and for psychological benefits; however, further clinical research is needed to compare the benefits of therapeutic horseback riding to other interventions. Findings in the literature do not support the use of hippotherapy in the treatment of neuromuscular disorders. Further evidence based research is needed to determine whether hippotherapy is effective in the treatment of CP, MS or other motor disorders. There is also a lack of evidence regarding the therapeutic value of hippotherapy for other conditions, such as behavioral or psychiatric disorders.

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Debuse, D., Chandler, C., Gibb, C. (2005, October). An exploration of German and British physiotherapists' views on the effects of hippotherapy and their measurement. *Physiotherapy Theory Practice*; 21 (1): 51-77.

Hamill, D., Washington, K.A., White, O.R. (2007). The effect of hippotherapy on postural control in sitting for children with cerebral palsy. *Physical Occupational Therapy Pediatrics*; 27(4): 23-42.

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McGibbon, N.H.(1998) Effect of an equine-movement therapy program on gait, energy expenditure, and motor function in children with spastic cerebral palsy. *Developmental Medicine and Child Neurology*, 40, 754-62.

McGibbon, N.H., Benda, W., Duncan, B.R., Silkwood-Sherer, D., (2009, June). Immediate and long-term effects of hippotherapy on symmetry of adductor muscle activity and functional ability in children with spastic cerebral palsy. *Archives of Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation*, 90(6):966-74.

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Approved by BCBSVT and TVHP Medical Directors      Date Approved

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