

**SUBJECT: PHYSICAL THERAPY (PT)**

**EFFECTIVE DATE: 11/19/99**

**REVISED DATE: 07/19/01, 08/22/02, 01/22/04, 04/28/05,  
04/27/06, 02/22/07, 04/24/08, 04/23/09,  
06/24/10, 06/24/11, 08/23/12, 08/22/13,  
08/28/14**

**POLICY NUMBER: 8.01.12**

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**CATEGORY: Therapy/Rehabilitation**

- *If the member's subscriber contract excludes coverage for a specific service it is not covered under that contract. In such cases, medical policy criteria are not applied.*
- *Medical policies apply to commercial and Medicaid products only when a contract benefit for the specific service exists.*
- *Medical policies only apply to Medicare products when a contract benefit exists and where there are no National or Local Medicare coverage decisions for the specific service.*

## **POLICY STATEMENT:**

- I. Based upon our criteria and review of the peer-reviewed literature, acute, restorative or rehabilitative land or water (hydro, aquatic) based physical therapy (PT) services have been medically proven to be effective and therefore, **medically appropriate** when performed to meet the needs of an *adult* patient who suffers from a medically determinable functional physical impairment, weakness, atrophy, and/or a decreased range of motion, as determined by standardized assessment, due to disease, trauma, congenital anomalies or prior therapeutic intervention.

In determining the medical appropriateness of PT services consideration will be given to the degree/severity of limitation/deficit the impairment imposes on the individual and whether the deficit(s) are expected to improve over a short period of time (generally up to two months) with treatment. In order for ongoing treatment to continue to be considered medically necessary significant improvement must be demonstrated in objective measures.

- II. Based upon our criteria and review of the peer-reviewed literature, active, restorative or rehabilitative land or water based physical therapy has been medically proven to be effective and is **medically appropriate** for *children* suffering from a medically determinable severe impairment, as determined by standardized assessments, resulting from disease, trauma, congenital anomaly or previous therapeutic processes.

A medically determinable severe delay or disorder in a child is identified by a functional impairment/deficit that adversely affects the child's performance or a significant delay or disorder in one or more functional areas, as compared to accepted milestones for child development, which adversely affects the child's ability to learn.

Significant delays or disorders in children are defined by:

- A 33% delay in one functional area or a 25% delay in each of two areas; or
- If appropriate standardized instruments are individually administered in the evaluation process, a score of at least 2.0 standard deviations below the mean in one functional area or score of at least 1.5 standard deviations below the mean in each of two functional areas.

- III. Based upon our criteria and review of the peer-reviewed literature, non-skilled services that do not generally require the skills of a qualified provider of PT services are **not medically necessary**. These services may include:

- passive range of motion (ROM) treatment which is not related to restoration of a specific loss of function;
- any of the following treatments when given alone or to a patient who presents no complications: hot packs; hydrocollator; infrared heat; whirlpool baths; paraffin baths; Hubbard tank; cold packs; ice packs, contrast baths, aquatic exercises; and
- services which maintain function by using routine, repetitive procedures, exercise, conditioning or gym programs (land or water based) for chronic conditions such as fibromyalgia, or chronic pain syndrome (chronic low back pain).

- IV. Based upon our criteria and review of the peer-reviewed literature, the following services have not been medically proven effective and are considered **not medically necessary**:

- Gait analysis;
- Hippotherapy, Equine Movement Therapy, Horseback riding;
- Isokinetic testing, with an isokinetic dynamometer (e.g. Bidex, Cybex II, Omnikinetic, Lido Active) in the

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- assessment of muscle strength;
- D. Vibromyography (e.g., Myowave) to measure muscle effort and detect imbalance;
  - E. Physical therapy programs solely for sports and/or recreational purposes (e.g., conditioning, strength training, aquatic exercise programs such as water aerobics and water walking).
- V. Based upon our criteria and review of the peer-reviewed literature, work-related or workers compensation programs (e.g., work-evaluation, work reconditioning, work hardening programs, sheltered work programs, vocational training) are **not medically necessary** as these programs are for conditioning primarily for return to work and not treatment of a medical condition.

When PT services are needed to treat a medical or surgical condition in order for a patient to return to work services are covered by the New York State Vocational and Educational Services for Individuals with Disabilities (VESID) Program.

- VI. Maintenance programs are programs that consist of activities that preserve the patient's present level of function and prevent regression of that function. Maintenance begins when the therapeutic goals of a treatment plan have been achieved or when no additional functional progress is apparent or expected to occur. Maintenance programs are **not medically necessary**.

*Refer to Corporate Medical Policy #2.01.13 regarding Computerized Motion Diagnostic Imaging (CMDI)/Gait Analysis.*

*Refer to Corporate Medical Policy # 8.01.17 regarding Occupational Therapy.*

*Refer to Corporate Medical Policy # 8.01.19 regarding Cognitive Rehabilitation.*

*Refer to Corporate Medical Policy # 10.01.02 regarding Chiropractic Care.*

*Refer to Corporate Medical Policy # 10.01.09 regarding Early Intervention Program services.*

#### **POLICY GUIDELINES:**

- I. Physical therapy must meet **all** of the following criteria:
  - A. meet the functional needs of a patient who suffers from a functional physical impairment due to disease, trauma, congenital anomalies or prior therapeutic intervention;
  - B. achieve a specific diagnosis-related goal for a patient who has a reasonable expectation of achieving measurable improvement in a reasonable and predictable period of time;
  - C. provide specific, effective, and reasonable treatment for the patients diagnosis and physical condition;
  - D. be delivered by a qualified provider of physical therapy services (a qualified provider is one who is licensed where required and performs within the scope of licensure); and
  - E. require the judgment, knowledge, and skills of a qualified provider of physical therapy services due to the complexity and sophistication of the therapy and the physical condition of the patient.
- II. Physical therapy office records must contain a written plan of care; which should include:
  - A. diagnosis;
  - B. specific statements of long and short-term goals;
  - C. measurable objectives;
  - D. a reasonable estimate of when the goals will be reached;
  - E. the specific treatment techniques and/or activities to be used in treatment; and
  - F. the frequency and duration of treatment.
- III. Physical therapy of the hand rendered by a qualified, licensed Occupational Therapist is medically appropriate when the services are within the scope of practice of the Occupational Therapist, the patients contract provides coverage for physical therapy, and the patient meets the criteria stated in this policy for physical therapy.

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- V. Coverage is not available for services provided by school districts, as stipulated in the child's (pre-school ages 3-5 years and school-aged 5-21 years) Individualized Education Program (IEP).
- A. When applicable, an IEP must be completed through the school district before a request for coverage is submitted to the Health Plan.
  - B. If a child is home schooled an assessment by the school district should be completed prior to submitting a request to the Health Plan for coverage. Requests for services for home schooled children outside New York State will be reviewed on an individual basis in accordance with state regulations for the state in which the child lives.
  - C. Physical therapy services denied by the school district, including summer services, and not covered in a child's IEP will be reviewed by the Health Plan for medical necessity in accordance with member's contract.
  - D. Interim summer programs are provided by school districts for children whose handicapping conditions are severe enough to exhibit the need for a structured learning environment of 12 months duration in order to maintain developmental levels. For preschool children, summer instruction must be available for those whose disabilities are severe enough to exhibit the need for a structured learning environment of 12 months duration to prevent substantial regression.
- VI. Benefits for habilitative services are contract dependent. Please refer to the member's subscriber contract for specific benefit information.

**DESCRIPTION:**

Physical Therapy (PT) is the treatment of disease or injury by the use of therapeutic exercise and other interventions that focus on improving posture, locomotion, strength, endurance, balance, coordination, joint mobility, flexibility, the ability to perform the functional activities of daily living and the relief of pain. PT is a short-term therapy for which significant, measurable improvements are the expected result.

Treatment may include active and passive modalities using a variety of means and techniques based upon biomechanical and neuropsychological principles. Treatments provided as part of a physical therapy session may include:

- I. Therapeutic exercise programs, including coordination and resistive exercises to increase strength and endurance;
- II. Thermotherapy;
- III. Cryotherapy;
- IV. Hydrotherapy/aquatic therapy - water-based interventions usually performed in a pool; and/or
- V. Massage, traction, or mobilization techniques.

Clinical assessment of the patient's muscle strength, prior to the initiation of PT, is essential to determining the therapeutic effectiveness of PT. Assessment data is obtained through a variety of standardized tests (e.g., measurement of size and/or weight of effected body part, functional performance, and manual or isokinetic muscle evaluation).

Physical impairments range in severity from mild to severe and are classified according to their level of severity. A mild impairment is less than 1 standard deviation from normal, a moderate impairment is 1-2 standard deviations from normal, and a severe impairment is more than 2 standard deviations from normal.

Vibromyography (VMG) is proposed as a means of measuring muscle effort and detecting imbalance. VMG is utilizes a device, such as the Myowave (Sonostics, Inc). The device non-invasively captures skin surface vibrations from the muscle through a sensor. The muscle vibration readings are then analyzed to provide information on the peak effort for each muscle assessed, the time required for each muscle to reach peak effort, and muscle balance ratios.

Pursuant to New York State law, effective November 1, 2012, each contract providing physician services, medical, major medical, or similar comprehensive-type coverage must provide coverage for the screening, diagnosis, and treatment of Autism Spectrum Disorders when prescribed or ordered by a licensed physician or a licensed psychologist for medically necessary services. Treatment includes services provided by a licensed or certified speech therapist, occupational therapist, physical therapist, and social worker when the policy generally provides such coverage. Therapeutic treatment must include care that is deemed habilitative or non-restorative. The law prohibits the imposition

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of limitations that are solely applied to the treatment of Autism Spectrum Disorder. However, as long as the visit limit is not imposed solely on services required to treat Autism Spectrum Disorder, a visit limit continues to be permissible.

As of January 1, 2014, the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act (PPACA) requires all health insurers to provide essential health benefits in the individual and small group markets, including rehabilitative services. According to the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act, rehabilitative services are health care services that help a person keep, learn or improve skills and functioning for daily living and include the management of limitations and disabilities, including services or programs that help maintain or prevent deterioration in physical, cognitive, or behavioral function.

**RATIONALE:**

Hippotherapy - A search of literature published in the past 5 years addressing hippotherapy for cerebral palsy (CP) and autism was completed. Three very small studies that included 7-17 patients were identified addressing CP; but none are large enough to permit scientific conclusions regarding hippotherapy for patients with CP. No studies were identified that address autism.

Isokinetic Testing – Several isokinetic dynamometers have received FDA approval. Published literature suggests that due to the large variations in testing methods isokinetic dynamometry has not been medically proven to improve net health outcomes or be more effective than established methods of assessment of muscle strength. The effectiveness of isokinetic dynamometry has not been demonstrated outside the investigational setting.

Vibromyography- A search of the peer-reviewed published literature addressing vibromyography identified few studies that have been recently published. Identified studies generally include very small study populations and include several limitations. The efficacy of vibromyography has not been medically proven to be effective or to improve health outcomes.

**CODES:**      Number      Description

*Eligibility for reimbursement is based upon the benefits set forth in the member's subscriber contract.*

**CODES MAY NOT BE COVERED UNDER ALL CIRCUMSTANCES. PLEASE READ THE POLICY AND GUIDELINES STATEMENTS CAREFULLY.**

Codes may not be all inclusive as the AMA and CMS code updates may occur more frequently than policy updates.

Code Key: Experimental/Investigational = (E/I), Not medically necessary/ appropriate = (NMN).

\*\*\* Note: Reimbursement mechanisms vary by Health Plan Region. Services may be reimbursed on a per modality or a global reimbursement basis.\*\*\*

<b>CPT:</b>	97001	Physical therapy evaluation
	97002	Physical therapy re-evaluation
	97010	Application of a modality to one or more areas; hot or cold packs
	97012	traction, mechanical
	97014	electrical stimulation, unattended
	97016	vasopneumatic devices
	97018	paraffin bath
	97022	whirlpool
	97024	diathermy (eg, microwave)
	97026	infrared
	97028	ultraviolet

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97032	Application of a modality to one or more areas; electrical stimulation (manual), each 15 minutes
97033	iontophoresis, each 15 minutes
97034	contrast baths, each 15 minutes
97035	ultrasound, each 15 minutes
97036	Hubbard tank, each 15 minutes
97110	Therapeutic procedure, one or more areas, each 15 minutes; therapeutic exercises to develop strength and endurance, range of motion and flexibility
97112	neuromuscular reeducation and movement, balance, coordination, kinesthetic sense, posture, and proprioception
97113	aquatic therapy with therapeutic exercises
97116	gait training (includes stair climbing)
97124	massage, including effleurage, petrissage and/or tapotement (stroking, compression, percussion)
97140	Manual therapy techniques (eg, mobilization/manipulation, manual lymphatic drainage, manual traction), one or more regions, each 15 minutes
97150	Therapeutic procedure(s), group (2 or more individuals)
97750	Physical performance test or measurement (eg, musculoskeletal, functional capacity), with written report, each 15 minutes

**Note: Considered NMN when used for isokinetic testing or vibromyography.**

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<b>HCPCS:</b>	S8940 (NMN)	Equestrian/hippotherapy, per session
	S8990 (NMN)	Physical or manipulative therapy performed for maintenance rather than restoration
	S9131	Physical therapy; in the home, per diem

<b>MODIFIER:</b>	SZ	Habilitative services
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<b>ICD9:</b>	Several
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<b>ICD10:</b>	Several
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#### **KEY WORDS:**

Aquatic therapy, Biodex, Cybex, Gait analysis, Hippotherapy, Hydrotherapy, Isokinetic dynamometry, Isokinetic testing, Myowave, Physical therapy, PT, Vibromyography (VMG).

## **CMS COVERAGE FOR MEDICARE PRODUCT MEMBERS**

There is currently a Local Coverage Determination (LCD) addressing Outpatient Physical and Occupational Therapy Services. Please refer to the following websites for Medicare Members:

[http://apps.ngsmedicare.com/lcd/LCD\\_L26884.htm](http://apps.ngsmedicare.com/lcd/LCD_L26884.htm).