

Medical Benefit		Effective Date: 04/01/14	Next Review Date: 09/18
Preauthorization	No	Review Dates: 04/07, 05/08, 03/09, 01/10, 01/11, 01/12, 01/13, 01/14, 09/14, 09/15, 09/16, 09/17	

Preauthorization is not required.

The following protocol contains medical necessity criteria that apply for this service. The criteria are also applicable to services provided in the local Medicare Advantage operating area for those members, unless separate Medicare Advantage criteria are indicated. If the criteria are not met, reimbursement will be denied and the patient cannot be billed. Please note that payment for covered services is subject to eligibility and the limitations noted in the patient's contract at the time the services are rendered.

Description

Emergency ambulance services involve the use of specially designed and equipped vehicles to transport ill or injured patients. These services may involve ground, air, or sea transport.

Policy

Ground emergency medical transport services are **medically necessary** when **all** the following criteria are met:

- The medical transport services must comply with all local, state, and federal laws and must have all the appropriate, valid licenses and permits;
- The ambulance or other medical transport services must have the necessary patient care equipment and supplies;
- The patient's condition must be such that any other form of transportation would be medically contraindicated;
- The patient must be transported to the nearest hospital with the appropriate facilities for the treatment of the patient's illness or injury or, in the case of organ transplantation, to the approved transplant facility.

In exceptional circumstances, air or sea ambulance services may be **medically necessary**. In these circumstances, all of the criteria pertaining to ground transportation must be met as well as any of the following:

- The patient's medical condition requires immediate and rapid ambulance transport that could not have been provided by land ambulance;
- The point of pick up is inaccessible by land vehicle;
- Great distances, limited time frames, or other obstacles are involved in getting the patient to the nearest hospital with appropriate facilities for treatment, e.g., transport of a critically ill patient to an approved transplant facility with a waiting organ;
- The patient's condition is such that the time needed to transport a patient by land poses a threat to the patient's health.

Medicare Advantage

Medical necessity is established when the patient's condition is such that use of any other method of transportation is contraindicated. If some means of transportation other than an ambulance could be used without endangering the individual's health, then ambulance is **not medically necessary**, whether or not such other transportation is actually available. The presence (or absence) of a physician's order for a transport by ambulance does not necessarily prove (or disprove) whether the transport was medically necessary.

Air ambulance, either by means of a helicopter or fixed wing aircraft, may be determined to be **medically necessary** provided the patient's medical condition requires immediate and rapid ambulance transportation that could not have been provided by ground ambulance; and either:

- The point of pickup is inaccessible by ground vehicle (this condition could be met in Hawaii, Alaska, and in other remote or sparsely populated areas of the continental United States), or
- Great distances or other obstacles are involved in getting the patient to the nearest hospital with appropriate facilities.

Medical necessity is only established when the patient's condition is such that the time needed to transport the patient by ground, or the instability of transportation by ground, poses a threat to the patient's survival or seriously endangers the patient's health. Examples of situations that could be **medically necessary** include but are not limited to:

- Intracranial bleeding - requiring neurosurgical intervention;
- Cardiogenic shock;
- Burns requiring treatment in a burn center;
- Conditions requiring emergency treatment in a Hyperbaric Oxygen Unit;
- Multiple severe injuries; or
- Life-threatening trauma.

When the air ambulance takes off to pick up a patient, but the patient is pronounced dead before being loaded onto the ambulance for transport (either before or after the ambulance arrives on the scene) that would also be considered **medically necessary**. Charges for mileage in this case would not be appropriate.

Services that are the subject of a clinical trial do not meet our Technology Assessment Protocol criteria and are considered investigational. *For explanation of experimental and investigational, please refer to the Technology Assessment Protocol.*

It is expected that only appropriate and medically necessary services will be rendered. We reserve the right to conduct prepayment and postpayment reviews to assess the medical appropriateness of the above-referenced procedures. **Some of this protocol may not pertain to the patients you provide care to, as it may relate to products that are not available in your geographic area.**

References

We are not responsible for the continuing viability of web site addresses that may be listed in any references below.

1. New York State Insurance Law, § 3216 (i) (24) (a), § 4303 (aa) (1).
2. Medicare Benefit Policy Manual, Chapter 10 – Ambulance Services, revised 9/09/16.
<https://www.cms.gov/Regulations-and-Guidance/Guidance/Manuals/Downloads/bp102c10.pdf>