Instructions for use

The following coverage policy applies to health benefit plans administered by Cigna. Coverage policies are intended to provide guidance in interpreting certain standard Cigna benefit plans and are used by medical directors and other health care professionals in making medical necessity and other coverage determinations. Please note the terms of a customer’s particular benefit plan document may differ significantly from the standard benefit plans upon which these coverage policies are based. For example, a customer’s benefit plan document may contain a specific exclusion related to a topic addressed in a coverage policy.

In the event of a conflict, a customer’s benefit plan document always supersedes the information in the coverage policy. In the absence of federal or state coverage mandates, benefits are ultimately determined by the terms of the applicable benefit plan document. Coverage determinations in each specific instance require consideration of:

1. The terms of the applicable benefit plan document in effect on the date of service
2. Any applicable laws and regulations
3. Any relevant collateral source materials including coverage policies
4. The specific facts of the particular situation

Coverage policies relate exclusively to the administration of health benefit plans. Coverage policies are not recommendations for treatment and should never be used as treatment guidelines.

This evidence-based medical coverage policy has been developed by eviCore, Inc. Some information in this coverage policy may not apply to all benefit plans administered by Cigna.

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CMM-208.1 Definitions

Radiofrequency joint denervation/ablation (i.e., facet neurotomy, facet rhizotomy) refers to the insertion of a radiofrequency probe towards the medial branch of the posterior primary rami, which supplies the innervation to the facet joints under fluoroscopic guidance. The radiofrequency electrode is then utilized to create a “continuous” heat lesion by coagulating the nerve supplying the joint with the intention of providing pain relief by denervating the painful facet joint. The injection/block applies directly to the facet joint(s) blocked/ablated and not to the number of nerves blocked/ablated that innervate the facet joint(s).

CMM-208.2 General Guidelines

When performing radiofrequency joint denervations/ablations, it may be necessary to perform the procedure at the same level(s) bilaterally; however, no more than three (3) levels should be performed during the same session/procedure.

CMM-208.3 Indications

A radiofrequency joint denervation/ablation is considered medically necessary for ANY of the following indications:

- For facet mediated pain resulting from disease, injury when BOTH of the following criteria are met:
  - Failure of at least three (3) months of conservative therapy (e.g., exercise, physical methods including physical therapy, chiropractic care, nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs [NSAID’s] and/or analgesics)
  - Two positive diagnostic facet joint injections/medial branch blocks using a local anesthetic as evidenced by 80% pain relief for the duration of the local anesthetic used.

- For an individual with a spinal fusion and facet mediated pain resulting from disease, injury or surgery, when the procedure is performed at an unfused spinal segment located either above or below the posterior fused spinal segment, and BOTH of the following criteria are met:
  - Failure of at least three (3) months of conservative therapy (e.g., exercise, physical methods including physical therapy, chiropractic care, NSAID’s, and/or analgesics)
  - Two positive diagnostic facet joint injections/medial branch blocks using local anesthetic as evidenced by 80% pain relief for the duration of the local anesthetic used.

- A repeat radiofrequency joint denervation/ablation when BOTH of the following criteria are met:
  - There is documented pain relief of at least 50% which has lasted for a minimum of 12 weeks
  - The procedure is performed at a minimum of six months following the prior denervation/ablation
CMM 208.4 Non-Indications

Performance of a radiofrequency joint denervation/ablation for ANY of the following indications is considered **not medically necessary**:

- When performed without the use of fluoroscopic guidance
- Performing more than two procedures at the same level(s) during a 12 month period of time
- In the absence of two sequential positive diagnostic facet joint injections/medial branch
- When performed for neck pain or low back pain in the presence of an untreated radiculopathy.
- When performed at a posteriorly fused spinal motion segment
- When performed on more than three (3) spinal levels during the same session/procedure
- When performed to treat pain arising from above C2-3 and below L5-S1 spinal levels

Performance of radiofrequency joint denervation/ablations for ANY of the following indications is considered **experimental, investigational, or unproven**:

- Pulsed radiofrequency ablation for chronic pain syndromes
- Endoscopic radiofrequency denervation/endoscopic dorsal ramus rhizotomy
- Cryoablation/cryoneurolysis/cryodenervation
- Chemical ablation (e.g., alcohol, phenol, glycerol)
- Laser ablation
- Ablation by any method for sacroiliac (SI) joint pain
- Cooled radiofrequency ablation

**CMM-208.5 Procedure (CPT®) Codes**

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<tr>
<td>64633</td>
<td>Destruction by neurolytic agent, paravertebral facet joint nerve(s), with imaging guidance (fluoroscopy or CT), cervical or thoracic, single facet joint</td>
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<tr>
<td>64634</td>
<td>Destruction by neurolytic agent, paravertebral facet joint nerve(s), with imaging guidance (fluoroscopy or CT), cervical or thoracic, each additional facet joint (List separately in addition to code for primary procedure)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>64635</td>
<td>Destruction by neurolytic agent, paravertebral facet joint nerve(s), with imaging guidance (fluoroscopy or CT), lumbar or sacral, single facet joint</td>
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CMM-208.6 References
