

Medical Policy

Acupuncture

Policy Number: 03

	Commercial and Qualified Health Plans	MassHealth*
Authorization required Visits 21 and beyond		X
No notification or authorization required	X [±]	X (visit 1-20)

*MassHealth Family Assistance does not have an acupuncture benefit.

Commercial plans and Qualified Health Plans[±]

Acupuncture is a form of complementary medicine that may be covered on specific commercial plans without prior authorization. Please refer to individual plan materials for details surrounding coverage limits.

Mass Health

These guidelines apply to Mass Health members starting at visit # 21. The treating specialist must request prior authorization for acupuncture beyond the first 20 visits.

Coverage Guidelines

Mass General Brigham Health Plan covers acupuncture in accordance with MassHealth coverage requirements when Mass General Brigham Health Plan determines that acupuncture is medically necessary for the treatment of pain and as an alternative to anesthesia. Acupuncture may be provided by in-network physicians, doctors of osteopathy, independent nurse practitioners licensed in acupuncture, independent nurse midwives licensed in acupuncture, and acupuncturists licensed by the Massachusetts Board of Registration. Mass General Brigham Health Plan does not prior authorize acupuncture as an alternative to anesthesia.

Acupuncture for Pain

Mass General Brigham Health Plan may cover medically necessary acupuncture for pain beyond 20 visits when: 1) there is medical record documentation supporting a medically necessary need, and 2) all of the following are met:

1. The member's benefit package includes coverage of acupuncture services.
2. All pertinent diagnoses are documented including: the condition causing pain, history, exam, and response to medical and acupuncture treatments to date.
3. There is a clearly identifiable need for further treatment due to a significant change in condition and/or new diagnosis of a painful condition that necessitates a different plan of care on visit 21 compared to visit 20.
4. The treating provider has established defined and measurable goals ¹
5. The provider has clearly defined the number of treatments needed to reach the goals.
6. The member is expected to significantly benefit from the treatment within a defined period of time.
7. There is demonstrated communication about the plan of care between the acupuncturist and the primary care physician.

¹ Goals: The treating provider must include all relevant outcomes to be measured. For continued services for goals not met, submitted documentation should include progress made toward the goal, any barriers that have or will impact the member's ability to meet the goal, the plan to address those barriers, and the anticipated number of visits that are needed to meet the goals.

Exclusions (MassHealth and Commercial)

1. Acupuncture for the treatment of any conditions other than noted above.
2. Acupuncture for any reason other than listed above.
3. Acupuncture for pain related to:
 - a. Fibromyalgia
 - b. Acute lower back pain
 - c. Rheumatoid arthritis
 - d. Osteoarthritis other than in the knee
 - e. Irritable bowel syndrome
 - f. Any other pain conditions for which there is limited literature to support its beneficial use and therefore considered experimental and investigational
4. Acupuncture for maintenance treatment
5. Services that are not acupuncture as meeting the definition described below.

Definitions

Acupuncture: The insertion of metal needles through the skin at certain points on the body, with or without the use of herbs, with or without the application of an electric current, and with or without the application of heat to the needles, skin, or both.

Related Policies

- [Acupuncture Services Provider Payment Guidelines](#)

Codes

Authorized CPT/HCPCS Codes	Code Description
97810	Acupuncture, 1 or more needles; without electrical stimulation, initial 15 minutes of personal one-on-one contact with the patient
97811	Acupuncture, 1 or more needles; without electrical stimulation, each additional 15 minutes of personal one-on-one contact with the patient, with re-insertion of needle(s) (List separately in addition to code for primary procedure)
97813	Acupuncture, 1 or more needles; with electrical stimulation, initial 15 minutes of personal one-on-one contact with the patient
97814	Acupuncture, 1 or more needles; with electrical stimulation, each additional 15 minutes of personal one-on-one contact with the patient, with re-insertion of needle(s) (List separately in addition to code for primary procedure)

Effective

June 2022: Annual update. References updated.

June 2021: Annual update. References updated.

June 2020: Annual update. Under MassHealth heading, minor formatting changes. For Exclusions heading, clarified for both MassHealth and Commercial. References updated./

June 2019: Annual update. No changes.

December 2018: Revised coverage guidelines. Removal of language regarding acute detoxification via Beacon. Added Commercial plans and Qualified Health Plans section.

May 2018: Annual update.

April 2018: Added codes.



January 2018: Annual update. Added language indicating certain select commercial plans limit coverage for acupuncture services to a total of 20 office visits per benefit period. Added sentence “These guidelines apply to Mass Health members starting at visit # 21.” Added exclusion # 5.

December 2016: Annual update

December 2015: Annual update.

December 2014: Effective date.

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