

Clinical Policy: Trigger Point Injections for Pain Management

Reference Number: CP.MP.169

Last Review Date: 08/19

[Coding Implications](#)

[Revision Log](#)

See [Important Reminder](#) at the end of this policy for important regulatory and legal information.

Description

Trigger points cause pain at their physical location and also referred pain to other areas in a specific pattern. Trigger point injections consist of an injection of a local anesthetic, with or without steroid medication, into a painful portion of the muscle containing the trigger point.

Policy/Criteria

It is the policy of health plans affiliated with Centene Corporation® that invasive pain management procedures performed by a physician are **medically necessary** when *the relevant criteria are met and the patient receives only one procedure per visit, with or without radiographic guidance.*

- I. Trigger point injections are **medically necessary** for the following indications:
 - A. *Diagnosis/stabilization* of trigger points with injections of corticosteroids and/or local anesthetics at the trigger point, all of the following:
 1. The member has local pain symptoms in the neck, shoulder and/or back that have persisted for more than 3 months causing tenderness and/or weakness, restricting motion and/or causing referred pain when compressed;
 2. The member has failed ≥ 3 weeks of conventional multidisciplinary medical therapy including all of the following:
 - a. Chiropractic, physical therapy, or prescribed home exercise program or the member is unable to tolerate such therapy and the injection is intended as a bridge to therapy;
 - b. NSAID unless contraindicated or not tolerated;
 - c. Activity modification;
 3. Trigger points have been identified by palpation;
 4. Trigger points are located in a *few* discrete areas and are not associated with widespread areas of muscle tenderness (as with fibromyalgia);
 5. Injections are not used as sole method of treatment, rather are intended for pain relief to facilitate mobilization to allow non-invasive modalities, e.g., physical therapy and other alternate therapies that address muscle strengthening, flexibility, and functional restoration.

Up to 2 sets of injections at least 7 days apart may be given for diagnosis and stabilization for the same trigger point. When a given body region is injected, it will be considered as one injection service no matter how many injections are given.

- B. *Additional trigger point injections*, all of the following:
 1. Prior injections resulted in $\geq 50\%$ improvement for ≥ 6 weeks;
 2. There was a return of pain and/or deterioration following 6 weeks of improvement;

CLINICAL POLICY

Trigger Point Injections

3. Injections are given in the neck, shoulder, and/or back;
4. Injections are given at least 2 months apart for up to 12 months (maximum of 6 sessions);
5. Injections are not used as sole method of treatment, but rather are intended for pain relief to facilitate mobilization to allow for non-invasive modalities, e.g., physical therapy and other alternate therapies that address muscle strengthening, flexibility, and functional restoration.

When a given body region is injected, it will be considered as one injection service no matter how many injections are given.

II. Trigger point therapies for the following indications are considered **not medically necessary**, because although there are ongoing studies, there is little scientifically based data that their use results in improved patient outcomes in the medical literature:

- A. Dry needle stimulation of trigger points;
- B. Trigger point injection with saline or glucose;
- C. The use of Botox during trigger point injections.

Background

A trigger point is a discrete, hyperirritative focus found in a palpable taut band occurring in any skeletal muscle and/or muscle fascia on the body that is particularly sensitive to touch and, when compressed, gives rise to characteristic referral pain patterns, tenderness and autonomic phenomena. Trigger points are thought to result from repetitive strain produced by acute or chronic overload or a degenerative and/or inflammatory problem, such as arthritis.

Trigger point injections of local anesthetic and/or steroids are a common intervention for back and neck pain, although evidence is mixed. A Cochrane review of injections for subacute and chronic back pain found no clear advantage of local or trigger point injections with a local anesthetic, with or without a corticosteroid, and control interventions for short-term pain relief across 3 trials.¹⁻³ Another systematic review found that intramuscular injection of lidocaine more effectively relieved neck pain in the short term than placebo.⁴

A systematic review of trigger point injections with botulinum toxin concluded that a statistically or clinically significant benefit could not be confirmed from the use of botulinum toxin-A used alone for chronic neck pain in the short term.⁶ Secondary outcomes such as pain, disability, and quality of life were also investigated without confirmed benefit of botulinum injections.⁶

There is preliminary evidence that dry needling of trigger points is effective for short-term pain relief, and to improve quality of life and range of motion when compared to a placebo, but further studies of high quality and with a standardized needling procedure are needed.⁷

Coding Implications

This clinical policy references Current Procedural Terminology (CPT®). CPT® is a registered trademark of the American Medical Association. All CPT codes and descriptions are copyrighted 2019, American Medical Association. All rights reserved. CPT codes and CPT descriptions are

CLINICAL POLICY
Trigger Point Injections

from the current manuals and those included herein are not intended to be all-inclusive and are included for informational purposes only. Codes referenced in this clinical policy are for informational purposes only. Inclusion or exclusion of any codes does not guarantee coverage. Providers should reference the most up-to-date sources of professional coding guidance prior to the submission of claims for reimbursement of covered services.

CPT codes that support coverage criteria

CPT® Codes	Description
20552	Injection(s); single or multiple trigger point(s), 1 or 2 muscle(s)
20553	Injection(s); single or multiple trigger point(s), 3 or more muscles

CPT codes that do not support coverage criteria

CPT® Codes	Description
20560	Needle insertion(s) without injection(s); 1 or 2 muscle(s)
20561	Needle insertion(s) without injection(s); 3 or more muscles

ICD-10-CM Diagnosis Codes that Support Coverage Criteria

+ Indicates a code requiring an additional character

ICD-10-CM Code	Description
M25.511-M25.519	Pain in shoulder
M54.5	Low back pain
M54.9	Dorsalgia, unspecified
M79.1	Myalgia

Reviews, Revisions, and Approvals	Date	Approval Date
Policy split from CP.MP.118 Injections for Pain Management. Minor rewording for clarity. Background updated.	08/18	08/18
References reviewed and updated. Specialist review.	07/19	08/19
CPT 20560 and 20561 added as not supporting coverage criteria.	04/20	

References

1. Staal JB et al. Injection therapy for subacute and chronic low-back pain. *Cochrane Database of Systematic Reviews* 2008, Issue 3. Art. No. CD001824. DOI: 10.1002/14651858.CD001824.pub3.
2. Chou R. Subacute and chronic low back pain: Nonsurgical interventional treatment. In: UpToDate, Atlas SJ (Ed), UpToDate, Waltham, MA. Accessed 7/19/19.
3. Scott NA, Guo B, Barton PM, Gerwin RD. Trigger point injections for chronic non-malignant musculoskeletal pain: A systematic review. *Pain Med.* 2009;10(1):54-69.
4. Peloso P, Gross A, Haines T, et al. Medicinal and injection therapies for mechanical neck disorders. *Cochrane Database Syst Rev.* 2007;(3):CD000319.
5. Cummings TM, White AR. Needling therapies in the management of myofascial trigger point pain: A systematic review. *Archiv Phys Med Rehab,* 2001;82(7):986-992.

CLINICAL POLICY**Trigger Point Injections**

6. Langevin P, Lowcock J, Weber J. Botulinum toxin intramuscular injections for neck pain: a systematic review and metaanalysis. *J Rheumatol*. 2011;38(2):203.
7. Espejo-Antúnez L, Tejada JF, Albornoz-Cabello M, et al. Dry needling in the management of myofascial trigger points: A systematic review of randomized controlled trials. *Complement Ther Med*. 2017 Aug;33:46-57. doi: 10.1016/j.ctim.2017.06.003. Epub 2017 Jun 15.
8. Chou R, et al. Diagnosis and treatment of low back pain: a joint clinical practice guideline from the American College of Physicians and the American Pain Society. *Ann Intern Med*. 2007;147:478-491.
9. Gerwin R. Botulinum toxin treatment of myofascial pain: a critical review of the literature. *Curr Pain Headache Rep*. 2012 Oct;16(5):413-22. doi: 10.1007/s11916-012-0287-6.
10. Han SC, Harrison P. Myofascial pain syndrome and trigger-point management. *Reg Anesth*. 1997 Jan-Feb;22(1):89-101.
11. Isaac Z. Treatment of neck pain. Atlas SJ (Ed). Updated Sep 21, 2017. In: UpToDate Waltham, MA: UpToDate. Accessed 7/19/19.
12. Medicare Local Coverage Determination. Trigger Point Injections (L36859). 5/26/2017

Important Reminder

This clinical policy has been developed by appropriately experienced and licensed health care professionals based on a review and consideration of currently available generally accepted standards of medical practice; peer-reviewed medical literature; government agency/program approval status; evidence-based guidelines and positions of leading national health professional organizations; views of physicians practicing in relevant clinical areas affected by this clinical policy; and other available clinical information. The Health Plan makes no representations and accepts no liability with respect to the content of any external information used or relied upon in developing this clinical policy. This clinical policy is consistent with standards of medical practice current at the time that this clinical policy was approved. “Health Plan” means a health plan that has adopted this clinical policy and that is operated or administered, in whole or in part, by Centene Management Company, LLC, or any of such health plan’s affiliates, as applicable.

The purpose of this clinical policy is to provide a guide to medical necessity, which is a component of the guidelines used to assist in making coverage decisions and administering benefits. It does not constitute a contract or guarantee regarding payment or results. Coverage decisions and the administration of benefits are subject to all terms, conditions, exclusions and limitations of the coverage documents (e.g., evidence of coverage, certificate of coverage, policy, contract of insurance, etc.), as well as to state and federal requirements and applicable Health Plan-level administrative policies and procedures.

This clinical policy is effective as of the date determined by the Health Plan. The date of posting may not be the effective date of this clinical policy. This clinical policy may be subject to applicable legal and regulatory requirements relating to provider notification. If there is a discrepancy between the effective date of this clinical policy and any applicable legal or regulatory requirement, the requirements of law and regulation shall govern. The Health Plan retains the right to change, amend or withdraw this clinical policy, and additional clinical policies may be developed and adopted as needed, at any time.

CLINICAL POLICY

Trigger Point Injections

This clinical policy does not constitute medical advice, medical treatment or medical care. It is not intended to dictate to providers how to practice medicine. Providers are expected to exercise professional medical judgment in providing the most appropriate care, and are solely responsible for the medical advice and treatment of members. This clinical policy is not intended to recommend treatment for members. Members should consult with their treating physician in connection with diagnosis and treatment decisions.

Providers referred to in this clinical policy are independent contractors who exercise independent judgment and over whom the Health Plan has no control or right of control. Providers are not agents or employees of the Health Plan.

This clinical policy is the property of the Health Plan. Unauthorized copying, use, and distribution of this clinical policy or any information contained herein are strictly prohibited. Providers, members and their representatives are bound to the terms and conditions expressed herein through the terms of their contracts. Where no such contract exists, providers, members and their representatives agree to be bound by such terms and conditions by providing services to members and/or submitting claims for payment for such services.

Note: For Medicaid members, when state Medicaid coverage provisions conflict with the coverage provisions in this clinical policy, state Medicaid coverage provisions take precedence. Please refer to the state Medicaid manual for any coverage provisions pertaining to this clinical policy.

Note: For Medicare members, to ensure consistency with the Medicare National Coverage Determinations (NCD) and Local Coverage Determinations (LCD), all applicable NCDs, LCDs, and Medicare Coverage Articles should be reviewed prior to applying the criteria set forth in this clinical policy. Refer to the CMS website at <http://www.cms.gov> for additional information.

©2018 Centene Corporation. All rights reserved. All materials are exclusively owned by Centene Corporation and are protected by United States copyright law and international copyright law. No part of this publication may be reproduced, copied, modified, distributed, displayed, stored in a retrieval system, transmitted in any form or by any means, or otherwise published without the prior written permission of Centene Corporation. You may not alter or remove any trademark, copyright or other notice contained herein. Centene® and Centene Corporation® are registered trademarks exclusively owned by Centene Corporation.