Medical Policy
Thermography

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Policy Number: 342
BCBSA Reference Number: 6.01.12

Related Policies
- Scintimammography and Gamma Imaging of the Breast and Axilla, #494
- Temporomandibular Joint Disorder, #035

Policy
Commercial Members: Managed Care (HMO and POS), PPO, and Indemnity

The use of any form of thermography is INVESTIGATIONAL.

Prior Authorization Information

Inpatient
- For services described in this policy, precertification/preauthorization IS REQUIRED for all products if the procedure is performed inpatient.

Outpatient
- For services described in this policy, see below for products where prior authorization might be required if the procedure is performed outpatient.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Outpatient</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Commercial Managed Care (HMO and POS)</td>
<td>This is not a covered service.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Commercial PPO and indemnity</td>
<td>This is not a covered service.</td>
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CPT Codes / HCPCS Codes / ICD Codes
Inclusion or exclusion of a code does not constitute or imply member coverage or provider reimbursement. Please refer to the member’s contract benefits in effect at the time of service to determine coverage or non-coverage as it applies to an individual member.

Providers should report all services using the most up-to-date industry-standard procedure, revenue, and diagnosis codes, including modifiers where applicable.

CPT Codes
There is no specific CPT code for this test.
ICD Diagnosis Codes
Investigational for all diagnoses.

Description
Infrared radiation from the skin or organ tissue reveals temperature variations by producing brightly colored patterns on a liquid crystal display. Thermography involves the use of an infrared scanning device and can include various types of telethermographic infrared detector images and heat-sensitive cholesteric liquid crystal systems.

Interpretation of the color patterns is thought to assist in the diagnosis of many disorders such as complex regional pain syndrome (previously known as reflex sympathetic dystrophy), breast cancer, Raynaud phenomenon, digital artery vasospasm in hand-arm vibration syndrome, peripheral nerve damage following trauma, impaired spermatogenesis in infertile men, degree of burns, deep vein thrombosis, gastric cancer, tear-film layer stability in dry-eye syndrome, Frey syndrome, headaches, lower back pain, and vertebral subluxation.

Thermography may also assist in treatment planning and procedure guidance by accomplishing the following tasks: identifying restricted areas of perfusion in coronary artery bypass grafting, identifying unstable atherosclerotic plaques, assessing response to methylprednisone in rheumatoid arthritis, and locating high undescended testicles.

Summary
Description
Thermography is a noninvasive imaging technique that measures temperature distribution in organs and tissues. The visual display of this temperature information is known as a thermogram. Thermography has been proposed as a diagnostic tool for treatment planning and for evaluation of treatment effects for a variety of conditions.

Summary of Evidence
For individuals who have an indication for breast cancer screening or diagnosis who receive thermography, the evidence includes diagnostic accuracy studies and systematic reviews. Relevant outcomes are overall survival, disease-specific survival, and test validity. Using histopathologic findings as to the reference standard, a series of systematic reviews of studies have evaluated the accuracy of thermography to screen and/or diagnose breast cancer and reported wide ranges of sensitivities and specificities. To date, no study has demonstrated whether thermography is sufficiently accurate to replace or supplement mammography for breast cancer diagnosis. Moreover, there are no studies on the impact of thermography on patient management or health outcomes for patients with breast cancer. The evidence is insufficient to determine the effects of the technology on health outcomes.

For individuals who have musculoskeletal injuries who receive thermography, the evidence includes diagnostic accuracy studies, a longitudinal prospective study, and a systematic review. Relevant outcomes are test validity, symptoms, and functional outcomes. A systematic review of studies on thermography for diagnosing musculoskeletal injuries found moderate levels of accuracy compared with other diagnostic imaging tests. There is a lack of a consistent reference standard. This evidence does not permit conclusions as to whether thermography is sufficiently accurate to replace or supplement standard testing. Moreover, there are no high-quality or randomized studies on the impact of thermography on patient management or health outcomes for patients with musculoskeletal injuries. The evidence is insufficient to determine the effects of the technology on health outcomes.

For individuals who have temporomandibular joint disorder who receive thermography, the evidence includes a systematic review. Relevant outcomes are test validity, symptoms, and functional outcomes. A systematic review of studies on thermography for diagnosing temporomandibular joint disorder found a wide variation in accuracy compared to other diagnostics. There is a lack of a consistent reference standard. The evidence does not permit conclusions as to whether thermography is sufficiently accurate to replace or supplement standard testing. Moreover, there are no studies on the impact of thermography...
on patient management or health outcomes for patients with the temporomandibular joint disorder. The evidence is insufficient to determine the effects of the technology on health outcomes.

For individuals who have miscellaneous conditions (e.g., herpes zoster, pressure ulcers, diabetic foot) who receive thermography, the evidence primarily includes diagnostic accuracy studies. Outcomes in these studies are test validity, symptoms, and functional outcomes. Most studies assessed temperature gradients or the association between temperature differences and the clinical condition. Due to the small number of studies for each indication, diagnostic accuracy could not adequately be evaluated. The clinical utility of thermography has only been considered in 1 study of diabetic foot ulcers. For these other miscellaneous conditions, the clinical utility of thermography has not been investigated. The evidence is insufficient to determine the effects of the technology on health outcomes.

**Policy History**

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<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Action</th>
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<tr>
<td>10/2021</td>
<td>BCBSA National medical policy review. Description, summary, and references updated. Policy statements unchanged.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1/2021</td>
<td>Medicare information removed. See MP #132 Medicare Advantage Management for local coverage determination and national coverage determination reference.</td>
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<tr>
<td>10/2017</td>
<td>New references added from BCBSA National medical policy.</td>
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<tr>
<td>10/2016</td>
<td>New references added from BCBSA National medical policy.</td>
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<tr>
<td>7/2015</td>
<td>New references added from BCBSA National medical policy.</td>
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<tr>
<td>6/2013</td>
<td>New references from BCBSA National medical policy.</td>
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<tr>
<td>4/09</td>
<td>Updated coding and references based on BCBSA policy # 6.01.12. No changes to policy statements.</td>
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<tr>
<td>10/08</td>
<td>Reviewed - Medical Policy Group - Hematology/Oncology. No changes to policy statements.</td>
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Information Pertaining to All Blue Cross Blue Shield Medical Policies
Click on any of the following terms to access the relevant information:

Medical Policy Terms of Use
Managed Care Guidelines
Indemnity/PPO Guidelines
Clinical Exception Process
Medical Technology Assessment Guidelines

References


40. Sardanelli F, Aase HS, Alvarez M, et al. Position paper on screening for breast cancer by the European Society of Breast Imaging (EUSOBI) and 30 national breast radiology bodies from Austria,
Belgium, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Israel, Lithuania, Moldova, The Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Serbia, Slovakia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland and Turkey. Eur Radiol. Jul 2017; 27(7): 2737-2743. PMID 27807699


