

Clinical Policy: Total Artificial Heart

Reference Number: CP.MP.127

Date of Last Revision: 05/26

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Description

The SynCardia temporary Total Artificial Heart (TAH) (SynCardia Systems Inc.), formerly known as the CardioWest Total Artificial Heart, is a biventricular pulsatile pump that replaces the patient's native ventricles and valves. This policy describes the medical necessity requirements for the total artificial heart.

Policy/Criteria

- I. It is the policy of health plans affiliated with Centene Corporation[®] that the Total Artificial Heart is **medically necessary** as a bridge to heart transplantation when all of the following criteria are met:
 - A. Member/enrollee is approved for cardiac transplant and is currently on transplant list;
 - B. New York Heart Association (NYHA) Functional Class IV;
 - C. Presence of non-reversible biventricular failure unresponsive to all other treatments;
 - D. Ineligible for other ventricular support devices;
 - E. Compatible donor heart is currently unavailable;
 - F. Imminent risk of death due to irreversible biventricular heart failure;
 - G. The device is approved by the United States Food and Drug Administration (FDA) and used according to the FDA-labeled indications, contraindications, warnings and precautions;
 - H. Member/enrollee is able to receive adequate anti-coagulation while on the total artificial heart.

- II. It is the policy of health plans affiliated with Centene Corporation that there is insufficient evidence to support the use of the Total Artificial Heart as destination therapy (permanent replacement of the failing heart).

Background

Heart transplantation has become the standard treatment for eligible patients with irreversible biventricular failure unresponsive to medical and surgical treatment.¹⁵ The SynCardia temporary Total Artificial Heart (TAH) system is indicated as a bridge to transplantation in cardiac transplant eligible candidates at risk of imminent death from biventricular heart failure. The TAH is a biventricular pulsatile pump that replaces the patient's native ventricles and valves and pumps blood to both the pulmonary and systemic circulations. The system consists of the implantable TAH and an external console connected by drivelines.

There is limited evidence on the use of TAH as a bridge to transplantation as compared with the use of left ventricular assist devices. However, the available evidence demonstrates that the TAH improves survival in transplant-eligible patients with biventricular heart failure at imminent risk of death.¹ Use of the TAH as a bridge to cardiac transplantation continues, but the volume of

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TAH implantations is very low (fewer than 100 cases per year in the United States).¹³ There is insufficient evidence on the use of TAH as destination therapy.

The TAH was originally approved by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) for in-hospital use. On June 26, 2014, the FDA approved the SynCardia Freedom portable driver for use in patients who have been implanted with the TAH and are clinically stable. The portable driver allows patients to be discharged from the hospital while waiting for a donor heart.

The SynCardia 50cc temporary Total Artificial Heart (TAH) is a smaller version of the SynCardia 70cc TAH. The 50cc temporary Total Artificial Heart System (50cc TAH-t) has received U.S. FDA approval as a bridge to transplantation in cardiac transplant eligible patients at risk of imminent death from biventricular failure. According to the manufacturer, Syncardia, the device is intended for use as a bridge to transplant in patients with smaller stature (i.e., BSA $\leq 1.85\text{m}^2$) and adequate T10 measurement (posterior sternum to anterior spine measurement at T10) or adequate room in the chest as determined by 3D imaging assessment or by other standard clinical assessments. Per SynCardia, those with a T10 measurement ≥ 10 cm should be considered for the 70cc TAH.¹⁴ Studies evaluating the 50cc TAH are very limited. A review of the SynCardia database between December 1985 and October 2019 identified fifty-one children supported, 36 with the 70 cc TAH-t and 15 with the 50 cc TAH-t with a total support time of 6,243 days.¹² There have been an increase in implants between 2015 and 2019 with a total of 13 patients being converted to the Freedom Driver support, and the majority of implants in the last 5 years have been with the 50 cc TAH-t.¹²

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 2025, American Medical Association. All rights reserved. CPT codes and CPT descriptions are 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 | Description |
|------------|--|
| 33927 | Implantation of a total replacement heart system (artificial heart) with recipient cardiectomy |
| 33928 | Replacement or repair of thoracic unit of a total replacement heart system (artificial heart) |

| Reviews, Revisions, and Approvals | Revision Date | Approval Date |
|--|---------------|---------------|
| Policy adopted from Health Net NMP188. | 9/16 | 12/16 |
| Annual review. Replaced investigational/experimental language in II & III with, “insufficient evidence to support the use of ...” Changed “review date” in the header to “date of last revision” and “date” in the | 11/21 | 11/21 |

| Reviews, Revisions, and Approvals | Revision Date | Approval Date |
|---|---------------|---------------|
| revision log header to “revision date.” References reviewed, updated and reformatted. | | |
| Annual review. Background updated with no impact on criteria. Changed “date” in the revision log header to “revision date.” References reviewed and updated. Specialist review. | 10/22 | 10/22 |
| Annual review. Removed criteria III. Updated background with no clinical significance. Removed ICD-10 code table. References reviewed and updated. | 07/23 | 07/23 |
| Annual review. References reviewed and updated. Reviewed by external specialist. | 06/24 | 06/24 |
| Annual review. Under I.F. added “due to irreversible biventricular heart failure”. References reviewed and updated. Reviewed by internal specialist. | 05/25 | 05/25 |
| Annual review. References reviewed and updated. Reviewed by external specialist. | 05/26 | 05/26 |

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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

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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.

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 member/enrollees. This clinical policy is not intended to recommend treatment for member/enrollees. Member/enrollees should consult with their treating physician in connection with diagnosis and treatment decisions.

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Note: For Medicaid member/enrollees, 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 member/enrollees, 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.

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