

Clinical Policy: Intradiscal Steroid Injections for Pain Management

Reference Number: CP.MP.167

Date of Last Revision: 07/26

[Coding Implications](#)

[Revision Log](#)

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

Description

Intradiscal steroid injections involve injecting glucocorticoids directly into the spinal disc that has been identified as the source of pain.

Policy/Criteria

- I. It is the policy of health plans affiliated with Centene Corporation® that intradiscal steroid injections are considered **not medically necessary** because effectiveness has not been established. The published literature suggests both positive and negative results. Further research is being done to determine the safety and efficacy of injecting steroids directly into the disc.

Background

There is limited and conflicting evidence regarding the effectiveness of intradiscal glucocorticoids for low back pain. In patients with magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) evidence of degenerative disc disease and a positive response to discography, two trials found no difference between intradiscal steroid and control injection (saline or local anesthetic). A third trial found that, in patients with degenerative disc disease who failed an epidural steroid injection, intradiscal steroid injection was superior to discography alone only in the subgroup of patients with inflammatory endplate changes on MRI.¹ However, outcomes were not well-defined in this trial, and levels of statistical significance were poorly reported.

A randomized trial of 135 patients with active discopathy treated with a glucocorticoid intradiscal injection during discography or discography alone, found that back pain was improved at one month in the intradiscal injection group, but the effect was not present at 12 months. Secondary outcomes such as activity limitations, use of analgesics, quality of life, and anxiety and depression did not differ between the treatment and control groups at either evaluated time point.³

A recent systematic review of six randomized controlled trials and three cohort studies found low-quality evidence that intradiscal corticosteroid injections provide temporary reduction in pain and disability in individuals with chronic discostebral low back pain and that intradiscal corticosteroid injections do not appear to be effective after six months.⁹ Likewise, another systemic review and meta-analysis study reported that intradiscal glucocorticoid injections reduced discogenic low back pain at short-term follow-up but had similar outcomes in comparison to the control group six months posttreatment.²

As a result, the North American Spine Society notes that there is insufficient evidence that intradiscal steroids provide improvements in pain or function in individuals with discogenic low back pain.¹⁰

Intradiscal Steroid Injections for Pain Management

Further, the use of intradiscal steroid injections is also debated because the latter may cause discitis, progression of disc degeneration, and calcification of the intervertebral disc.¹

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
22899	Unlisted procedure, spine

Reviews, Revisions, and Approvals	Revision Date	Approval Date
Policy split from CP.MP.118 Injections for Pain Management. Background updated.	08/18	08/18
Annual Review. Criteria section updated to single spacing. Background updated with no impact on criteria. References reviewed and updated. Specialist reviewed.	08/22	08/22
Annual review. References reviewed and updated.	08/23	08/23
Annual review. References reviewed and updated. Reviewed by external specialist.	07/24	07/24
Annual review. References reviewed and updated.	07/25	07/25
Annual review. Updated Background with no clinical significance. Coding reviewed. References reviewed and updated. Reviewed by an external specialist.	07/26	07/26

References

1. Chou R, Cohen SP. Subacute and chronic low back pain: Nonsurgical interventional treatment. UpToDate. www.uptodate.com. Published April 29, 2025. Updated January 27, 2026. Accessed June 3, 2026.
2. Riegger M, Le H, van Kuijk SMJ, et al. Intradiscal Glucocorticoid Injection in Discogenic Back Pain and Influence on Modic Changes: A Systematic Review and Meta-analysis of RCTs. *Pain Physician*. 2023;26(5):E449 to E465.
3. Nguyen C, Boutron I, Baron G, et al. Intradiscal Glucocorticoid Injection for Patients With Chronic Low Back Pain Associated With Active Discopathy: A Randomized Trial. *Ann Intern Med*. 2017;166(8):547 to 556. doi:10.7326/M16-1700
4. Cao P, Jiang L, Zhuang C, et al. Intradiscal injection therapy for degenerative chronic discogenic low back pain with end plate Modic changes. *Spine J*. 2011;11(2):100 to 106. doi: 10.1016/j.spinee.2010.07.001

CLINICAL POLICY

Intradiscal Steroid Injections for Pain Management

5. Chou R, Qaseem A, Snow V, 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 [published correction appears in *Ann Intern Med*. 2008 Feb 5;148(3):247 to 248. doi: 10.7326/0003-4819-148-3-200802050-00020.]. *Ann Intern Med*. 2007;147(7):478 to 491. doi:10.7326/0003-4819-147-7-200710020-00006
6. Heggeness MH. AAOS endorses back pain guidelines. *AAOS Now*. <https://www.maine-general.org/app/files/public/6460f387-09dc-4968-b162-eee6121a1497/aaosbackpainguidelines.pdf>. Published September 2010. Accessed June 4, 2026.
7. Manchikanti L, Datta S, Gupta S, et al. A critical review of the American Pain Society clinical practice guidelines for interventional techniques: part 2. Therapeutic interventions. *Pain Physician*. 2010;13(4):E215 to E264.
8. Zhang F, Wang S, Li B, Tian W, Zhou Z, Liu S. Intradiscal injection for the management of low back pain. *JOR Spine*. 2021;5(1)e1186. Published 2021 Dec 22. doi:10.1002/jsp2.1186
9. Miller S, Caragea M, Carson D, et al. The effectiveness of intradiscal corticosteroid injection for the treatment of chronic discovertebral low back pain: a systematic review. *Pain Med*. 2024;25(1):33 to 46. doi:10.1093/pm/pnad127
10. North American Spine Society. Evidence-based clinical guidelines for multidisciplinary spine care: diagnosis and treatment of low back pain. <https://www.spine.org/Research/Clinical-Guidelines>. Published 2020. Accessed June 4, 2026.

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

Intradiscal Steroid Injections for Pain Management

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.

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, member/enrollees and their representatives are bound to the terms and conditions expressed herein through the terms of their contracts. Where no such contract exists, providers, member/enrollees and their representatives agree to be bound by such terms and conditions by providing services to member/enrollees and/or submitting claims for payment for such services.

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.

©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.