

Clinical Policy: Ultrasound in Pregnancy

Reference Number: PA.CP.MP.38

Effective Date: 04/2018

Date of Last Revision: 2/20/2023

[Revision Log](#)
[Coding Implications](#)

Description

This policy outlines the medical necessity criteria for ultrasound use in pregnancy. Ultrasound is the most common fetal imaging tool used today. Ultrasound is accurate at determining gestational age, fetal number, viability, and placental location; and is necessary for many diagnostic purposes in obstetrics. The determination of the time and type of ultrasound should allow for a specific clinical question(s) to be answered. Ultrasound exams should be conducted only when indicated and must be appropriately documented.

Policy/Criteria

It is the policy of PA Health & Wellness that the following ultrasounds during pregnancy are considered **medically necessary** when the following conditions are met:

- I. [Standard first trimester ultrasound](#) (76801)
- II. [Standard second or third trimester ultrasound](#) (76805)
- III. [Detailed anatomic ultrasound](#) (76811)
- IV. [Transvaginal ultrasound](#) (76817)
- V. [Not medically necessary conditions](#)

- I. One standard *first trimester ultrasound* (76801) is allowed per pregnancy.

Subsequent standard first trimester ultrasounds are considered **not medically necessary** as a limited or follow-up ultrasound assessment (76815 or 76816) should be sufficient to provide a re-examination of suspected concerns.

- II. One standard *second or third trimester ultrasound* (76805) is allowed per pregnancy.

Subsequent standard second or third trimester ultrasounds are considered **not medically necessary** as a limited or follow-up ultrasound assessment (76815 or 76816) should be sufficient to provide a re-examination of suspected concerns.

- III. One *detailed anatomic ultrasound* (76811) is allowed per pregnancy when performed to evaluate for suspected anomaly based on history, laboratory abnormalities, or clinical evaluation; or when there are suspicious results from a limited or standard ultrasound. Further indications include the possibility of fetal growth restriction and multifetal gestation. This ultrasound must be billed with an appropriate high risk diagnosis code from Table 4 below.

A second detailed anatomic ultrasound is considered **medically necessary** if a new maternal fetal medicine specialist group is taking over care, a second opinion is required, or the patient has been transferred to a tertiary care center in anticipation of delivery of an anomalous fetus requiring specialized neonatal care.

Further detailed anatomic ultrasounds are considered **not medically necessary** as there is inadequate evidence of the clinical utility of multiple detailed fetal anatomic examinations.

IV. Transvaginal ultrasounds (TVU) are considered **medically necessary** when conducted in the first trimester for the same indications as a standard first trimester ultrasound, and later in pregnancy to assess cervical length, location of the placenta in women with placenta previa, or after an inconclusive transabdominal ultrasound. Cervical length screening is conducted for women with a history of preterm labor or to monitor a shortened cervix based on Table 1 below. Up to 12 transvaginal ultrasounds are allowed per pregnancy.

Table 1: Berghella approach to TVU measurement of cervical length for screening singleton gestations

Past pregnancy history	TVU cervical length screening	Frequency	Maximum # of TVU
Prior preterm birth 14 to 27 weeks	Start at 14 weeks and end at 24 weeks	Every 2 weeks as long as cervix is at least 30 mm*	11
Prior preterm birth 28 to 36 weeks	Start at 16 weeks and end at 24 weeks	Every 2 weeks as long as cervix is at least 30 mm*	9
No prior preterm birth	One exam between 18 and 24 weeks	Once	1

* Increase frequency to weekly in women with TVU cervical length of 26 to 29 mm, through 24 weeks. If ≤ 25 mm before 24 weeks, consider cerclage.

V. 3D and 4D ultrasounds are considered investigational and are therefore **not medically necessary**. Studies lack sufficient evidence that they alter management over two-dimensional ultrasound in a fashion that improves outcomes.

The following additional procedures are considered **not medically necessary**:

- Ultrasounds performed solely to determine the sex of the fetus or to provide parents with photographs of the fetus;
- Scans for growth evaluation performed less than 2 weeks apart;
- Ultrasound to confirm pregnancy in the absence of other indications;
- A follow-up ultrasound in the first trimester in the absence of pain or bleeding.

Classifications of fetal ultrasounds include:

I. Standard First Trimester Ultrasound - 76801

A standard first trimester ultrasound is performed before 14 weeks and 0 days of gestation. It can be performed transabdominally, transvaginally, or transperineally. When performed transvaginally, CPT 76817 should be used. It includes an evaluation of the presence, size, location, and number of gestational sac(s); and an evaluation of the gestational sac(s).

Indications for a first trimester ultrasound include the following:

- To confirm an intrauterine pregnancy
- To evaluate a suspected ectopic pregnancy
- To evaluate vaginal bleeding
- To evaluate pelvic pain
- To estimate gestational age
- To diagnose and evaluate multiple gestations
- To confirm cardiac activity
- As adjunct to chorionic villus sampling, embryo transfer, or localization and removal of an intrauterine device
- To assess for certain fetal anomalies, such as anencephaly, in high risk patients
- To evaluate maternal pelvic or adnexal masses or uterine abnormalities
- To screen for fetal aneuploidy (nuchal translucency) when a part of aneuploidy screening
- To evaluate suspected hydatidiform mole

II. Standard Second or Third Trimester Ultrasound - 76805

A standard ultrasound in the second or third trimester involves an evaluation of fetal presentation and number, amniotic fluid volume, cardiac activity, placental position, fetal biometry, and an anatomic survey.

Indications for a standard second or third trimester ultrasound include the following:

- Screening for fetal anomalies
- Evaluation of fetal anatomy
- Estimation of gestational age
- Evaluation of fetal growth
- Evaluation of vaginal bleeding
- Evaluation of cervical insufficiency
- Evaluation of abdominal and pelvic pain
- Determination of fetal presentation
- Evaluation of suspected multiple gestation
- Adjunct to amniocentesis or other procedure
- Evaluation of discrepancy between uterine size and clinical dates
- Evaluation of pelvic mass
- Examination of suspected hydatidiform mole
- Adjunct to cervical cerclage placement
- Evaluation of suspected ectopic pregnancy
- Evaluation of suspected fetal death
- Evaluation of suspected uterine abnormality
- Evaluation of fetal well-being
- Evaluation of suspected amniotic fluid abnormalities
- Evaluation of suspected placental abruption

- Adjunct to external cephalic version
- Evaluation of prelabor rupture of membranes or premature labor
- Evaluation for abnormal biochemical markers
- Follow-up evaluation of a fetal anomaly
- Follow-up evaluation of placental location for suspected placenta previa
- Evaluation with a history of previous congenital anomaly
- Evaluation of fetal condition in late registrants for prenatal care
- Assessment for findings that may increase the risk of aneuploidy

III. Detailed Anatomic Ultrasound - 76811

A detailed anatomic ultrasound is performed when there is an increased risk of an anomaly based on the history, laboratory abnormalities, or the results of the limited or standard ultrasound.

IV. Other Ultrasounds – 76817

A transvaginal ultrasound of a pregnant uterus can be performed in the first trimester of pregnancy and later in a pregnancy to evaluate cervical length and the position of the placenta relative to the internal cervical os. When this exam is done in the first trimester, the same indications for a standard first trimester ultrasound, 76801, apply.

Background

The Routine Antenatal Diagnostic Imaging with Ultrasound (RADIUS) trial showed that routine U/S screening of a low risk population did not lead to improved perinatal outcomes. This was a practice based, multi-center randomized trial. There were no significant differences in birth weight or preterm delivery rates.

Ultrasound is used most often in pregnancy for the estimation of gestational age. It has been shown that the use of multiple biometric parameters can allow for accuracy to within 3-4 days in a mid-trimester study (14-22 weeks). Accurate dating of a pregnancy is crucial as many important decisions might be made based on this date—whether or not to resuscitate an infant delivered prematurely, when to give antenatal steroids, when to electively deliver a term infant, and when to induce for post-dates.

Pregnancy dating with a first trimester or mid-trimester ultrasound will reduce the number of misdated pregnancies and subsequent unnecessary inductions for post-dates pregnancies. Third trimester ultrasounds for pregnancy dating are much less dependable.

Ultrasound is a helpful tool for the evaluation of fetal growth in at-risk pregnancies and the diagnosis of a small-for-gestational age baby (SGA). Those SGA babies with actual chronic hypoxemia and/or malnutrition can be termed growth restricted (FGR) if it is suspected that their growth has been less than optimal.

ACOG does not yet recommend the use of three- or four-dimensional ultrasound as a replacement for any necessary two-dimensional study. ACOG states “the technical advantages of

three-dimensional ultrasonography include its ability to acquire and manipulate an infinite number of planes and to display ultrasound planes traditionally inaccessible by two-dimensional ultrasonography. Despite these technical advantages, proof of a clinical advantage of three-dimensional ultrasonography in prenatal diagnosis in general still is lacking.”

The Society of Maternal Fetal Medicine specifically addresses what is often considered a level II screening U/S or routine U/S, stating:

“CPT 76811 is not intended to be the routine scan performed for all pregnancies. Rather, it is intended for a known or suspected fetal anatomic or genetic abnormality (i.e., previous anomalous fetus, abnormal scan this pregnancy, etc.). Thus, the performance of CPT 76811 is expected to be rare outside of referral practices with special expertise in the identification of, and counseling about, fetal anomalies.

It is felt by all organizations involved in the codes development and description that only one medically indicated CPT 76811 per pregnancy, per practice is appropriate. Once this detailed fetal anatomical exam (76811) is done, a second one should not be performed unless there are extenuating circumstances with a new diagnosis. It is appropriate to use CPT 76811 when a patient is seen by another maternal-fetal medicine specialist practice, for example, for a second opinion on a fetal anomaly, or if the patient is referred to a tertiary center in anticipation of delivering an anomalous fetus at a hospital with specialized neonatal capabilities.

Follow-up ultrasound for CPT 76811 should be CPT 76816 when doing a focused assessment of fetal size by measuring the BPD [biparietal diameter], abdominal circumference, femur length, or other appropriate measurements, OR a detailed re-examination of a specific organ or system known or suspected to be abnormal. CPT 76805 would be used for a fetal maternal evaluation of the number of fetuses, amniotic/chorionic sacs, survey of intracranial, spinal, and abdominal anatomy, evaluation of a 4-chamber heart view, assessment of the umbilical cord insertion site, assessment of amniotic fluid volume, and evaluation of maternal adnexa when visible when appropriate.”

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 2021, 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.

Table 2: CPT® Codes Covered When Supported by Appropriate Diagnosis

CPT Codes	Description
76801	Ultrasound, pregnant uterus, real time with image documentation, fetal and maternal evaluation, first trimester (<14 weeks 0 day), transabdominal approach; single or first gestation
76805	Ultrasound, pregnant uterus, real time with image documentation, fetal and maternal evaluation, after first trimester (≥14 weeks 0 day), transabdominal approach; single or first gestation
76811	Ultrasound, pregnant uterus, real time with image documentation, fetal and maternal evaluation plus detailed fetal anatomic examination, transabdominal approach; single or first gestation
76817	Ultrasound, pregnant uterus, real time with image documentation, transvaginal

Table 3: CPT Codes considered Not Medically Necessary:

CPT Codes	Description
76376	3D rendering with interpretation and reporting of computed tomography, magnetic resonance imaging, ultrasound, or other tomographic modality with image post-processing under concurrent supervision; not requiring image post-processing on an independent workstation
76377	requiring image post-processing on an independent workstation

Table 4: ICD-10 Diagnosis Codes that Support Medical Necessity for First Detailed Fetal Ultrasound

ICD-10-CM Code	Description
B06.00 – B06.9	Rubella [German measles]
B50.0 – B54	Malaria
B97.6	Parvovirus as the cause of diseases classified elsewhere
E66.01	Morbid (severe) obesity due to excess calories [severe obesity with a BMI of 35 or >]
O09.511 – O09.519	Supervision of elderly primigravida
O09.521 – O09.529	Supervision of elderly multigravida
O09.811 – O09.819	Supervision of pregnancy resulting from assisted reproductive technology
O24.011 – O24.019, O24.111 – O24.119, O24.311 – O24.319, O24.811 – O24.819, O24.911 – O24.919	Diabetes mellitus in pregnancy
O28.300 O28.500	Abnormal findings on antenatal screening of mother Abnormal chromosomal and genetic finding on antenatal screening of mother

ICD-10-CM Code	Description
O30.001 – O30.099	Twin pregnancy
O30.101 – O30.199	Triplet pregnancy
O30.201 – O30.299	Quadruplet pregnancy
O30.801 – O30.899	Other specified multiple gestation, unspecified number of placenta and unspecified number of amniotic sacs
O31.10x+ - O31.23x+	Continuing pregnancy after spontaneous abortion / intrauterine death of one fetus or more
O33.6xx+	Maternal care for disproportion due to hydrocephalic fetus
O33.7xx+	Maternal care for disproportion due to other fetal deformities
O35.0xx+	Maternal care for (suspected) central nervous system malformation in fetus
O35.1xx+	Maternal care for (suspected) chromosomal abnormality in fetus
O35.2xx+	Maternal care for (suspected) hereditary disease in fetus
O35.3xx+	Maternal care for (suspected) damage to fetus from viral disease in mother
O35.4xx+	Maternal care for (suspected) damage to fetus from alcohol
O35.5xx+	Maternal care for (suspected) damage to fetus by drugs
O35.6xx+	Maternal care for (suspected) damage to fetus by radiation
O35.8xx+	Maternal care for other (suspected) fetal abnormality and damage
O35.9xx+	Maternal care for (suspected) fetal abnormality and damage, unspecified
O36.011+ - O36.099+	Maternal care for rhesus isoimmunization
O36.111+ - O36.199+	Maternal care for other isoimmunization
O36.511+ - O36.599+	Maternal care for other known or suspected poor fetal growth
O40.1xx+ - O40.9xx+	Polyhydramnios
O41.00x+ - O41.03x+	Oligohydramnios
O69.81x+ - O69.89x+	Labor and delivery complicated by other cord complications
O71.9	Obstetric trauma, unspecified
O76	Abnormality in fetal heart rate and rhythm complicating labor and delivery
O98.311 – O98.319, O98.411 – O98.419, O98.511 – O98.519, O98.611 – O98.619, O98.711 – O98.719, O98.811 – O98.819	Other maternal infectious and parasitic diseases complicating pregnancy
O99.310 - O99.313	Alcohol use complicating pregnancy
O99.320 – O99.323	Drug use complicating pregnancy

ICD-10-CM Code	Description
O99.411 – O99.419	Diseases of the circulatory system complicating pregnancy
Q04.8	Other specified congenital malformations of brain [choroid plexus cyst]
Q30.1	Agenesis and underdevelopment of nose [absent or hypoplastic nasal bone]
Q62.0	Congenital hydronephrosis [fetal pyelectasis]
Q71.811 – Q71.819	Congenital shortening of upper limb [humerus]
Q72.811 – Q72.819	Congenital shortening of lower limb [femur]
Q92.0 – Q92.9	Other trisomies and partial trisomies of the autosomes, not elsewhere classified [fetuses with soft sonographic markers of aneuploidy]
R93.5	Abnormal findings on diagnostic imaging of other abdominal regions, including retroperitoneum
R93.811 - R93.89	Abnormal findings on diagnostic imaging of other specified body structures
Z68.35 – Z68.45	Body mass index [BMI] 35.0 – 70 or greater, adult

Reviews, Revisions, and Approvals	Revision Date	Approval Date
Policy created & reviewed	04/18	06/18
Added code range O30.801 – O30.899 to Table 4. References reviewed and updated. Annual review. Added O28.3, O28.5, O99.310 – O99.313. Expanded code range of R93.811 – R93.89	10/19	2/3/2020
Annual review completed. References reviewed and updated. Reviewed by specialist. Per 10/1/20 ICD-10 code updates, code set Z68.35 – Z68.45 was revised changing parenthesis around BMI to brackets with no change to code descriptor.	2/18/2021	5/3/2021
Section IV. Table 1, revised note * Increase frequency to weekly in women with TVU cervical length of 25 to 29 mm, to 26 to 29mm and changed “If < 25 mm before 24 weeks...” to ≤ 25mm; edited maximum # TVU to 11 for prior preterm birth at 14-27 weeks, and 9 for prior preterm birth at 28 to 36 weeks. Changed total number of allowed TVUS per pregnancy to 13. Removed “experimental” from section V. Changed “review date” in the header to “date of last revision” and “date” in the revision log header to “revision date.” References reviewed and updated.	12/22/2021	
Annual review. Added “detailed “ to criteria statement, section III: “Further detailed anatomic ultrasounds.....” for clarification. References reviewed and updated. Specialist review.	2/20/2023	

References

1. Alldred SK, Takwoingi Y, Guo B, et al. First and second trimester serum tests with and without first trimester ultrasound tests for Down's syndrome screening. *Cochrane Database Syst Rev*. 2017; 3(3):CD012599. Published 2017 Mar 15. doi:10.1002/14651858.CD012599.
2. American Academy of Pediatrics and American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists (ACOG). *Guidelines for perinatal care* – eighth edition. 2017. <https://www.acog.org/> Accessed 02/07/2022.
3. Fetal Growth Restriction: ACOG Practice Bulletin, Number 227. *Obstet Gynecol*. 2021 Feb 1;137(2):e16-e28. doi: 10.1097/AOG.0000000000004251.
4. American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists' Committee on Practice Bulletins—Obstetrics; Committee on Genetics; Society for Maternal-Fetal Medicine. Screening for Fetal Chromosomal Abnormalities: ACOG Practice Bulletin, Number 226. *Obstet Gynecol*. 2020;136(4):e48-e69. doi:10.1097/AOG.0000000000004084.
5. Committee on Practice Bulletins—Obstetrics and the American Institute of Ultrasound in Medicine. Ultrasound in Pregnancy. No. 175. Published December 2016. (reaffirmed 2020). Accessed February 4, 2022.
6. AIUM-ACR-ACOG-SMFM-SRU Practice Parameter for the Performance of Standard Diagnostic Obstetric Ultrasound Examinations. *J Ultrasound Med*. 2018;37(11):E13-E24. doi:10.1002/jum.14831.
7. Berghella V. Short cervix before 24 weeks: Screening and management in singleton pregnancies. UpToDate website. www.uptodate.com. Published September 10, 2021.. Accessed February 10, 2022..
8. Bricker L, Medley N, Pratt JJ. Routine ultrasound in late pregnancy (after 24 weeks' gestation). *Cochrane Database Syst Rev*. 2015;2015(6):CD001451. Published 2015 Jun 29. doi:10.1002/14651858.CD001451.pub4.
9. Caradeaux J, Eixarch E, Mazarico E, Basuki TR, Gratacos E, Figueras F. Longitudinal growth assessment for the prediction of adverse perinatal outcome in fetuses suspected to be small-for-gestational age. *Ultrasound Obstet Gynecol*. 2018 ;52(3):325-331. doi:10.1002/uog.18824.
10. Caughey AB, Nicholson JM, and Washington AE. First- vs. second-trimester ultrasound: the effect on pregnancy dating and perinatal outcomes. *Am J Obstet Gynecol* 008;198(6):703.e1-703.e6. doi:10.1016/j.ajog.2008.03.034.
11. Chervenak FA, Skupski DW, Romero R, et al. How accurate is fetal biometry in the assessment of fetal age? *Am J Obstet Gynecol* 1998;178(4):678-687. doi:10.1016/s0002-9378(98)70477-6.
12. Ewigman BG, Crane JP, Frigoletto FD, LeFevre ML, Bain RP, McNellis D.N. Effect of prenatal ultrasound screening on perinatal outcome. RADIUS Study Group. *N Engl J Med*. 1993;329(12):821-827. doi:10.1056/NEJM19930916329120.
13. Malone FD, Canick JA, Ball RH, et al. First-trimester or second-trimester screening, or both, for Down's syndrome. *N Engl J Med* 2005;353(19):2001–2011. doi:10.1056/NEJMoa043693.
14. Wax J, Minkoff H, Johnson A, Coleman B, Levine D, Helfgott A, O'Keeffe D, Henningsen C, Benson C. Consensus report on the detailed fetal anatomic ultrasound examination:

- indications, components, and qualifications. *J Ultrasound Med.* 2014 Feb;33(2):189-95. doi: 10.7863/ultra.33.2.189.
15. Whitworth M, Bricker L, Mullan C. Ultrasound for fetal assessment in early pregnancy. *Cochrane Database Syst Rev.* 2015(7):CD007058. Published 2015 Jul 14. doi: 10.1002/14651858.CD007058.pub3.
 16. Wald NJ, Watt HC, Hackshaw AK. Integrated screening for Down's syndrome on the basis of tests performed during the first and second trimesters. *N Engl J Med.* 1999; 341(7):461-467. doi:10.1056/NEJM199908123410701
 17. Zhang J, Merialdi M, Platt LD, Kramer MS. Defining normal and abnormal fetal growth: promises and challenges. *Am J Obstet Gynecol.* 2010;202(6):522-528. doi:10.1016/j.ajog.2009.10.889.
 18. American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists' Committee on Practice Bulletins—Obstetrics. Prediction and Prevention of Spontaneous Preterm Birth: ACOG Practice Bulletin, Number 234. *Obstet Gynecol.* 2021;138(2):e65-e90. doi:10.1097/AOG.0000000000004479