

# Clinical Policy: Trigger Point Injections for Pain Management

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[Coding Implications](#)

[Revision Log](#)

## Description

Trigger points cause pain at their physical location as well as 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

- I. It is the policy of Pennsylvania Health and Wellness® (PHW) 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*.
  - A. Trigger point injections are **medically necessary** for the following indications:
    1. Diagnosis/stabilization of trigger points with injections of corticosteroids and/or local anesthetics at the trigger point, all of the following:
      - a. The member/enrollee has local pain symptoms in the neck, shoulder and/or back that have persisted for more than three months causing tenderness and/or weakness, restricting motion and/or causing referred pain when compressed;
      - b. The member/enrollee has failed  $\geq 3$  weeks of conventional multidisciplinary medical therapy including all of the following:
        - i. Chiropractic, physical therapy, or prescribed home exercise program or the member/enrollee is unable to tolerate such therapy and the injection is intended as a bridge to therapy;
        - ii. NSAID, unless contraindicated or not tolerated;
        - iii. Activity modification;
  - B. Trigger points have been identified by palpation;
  - C. Trigger points are located in a few discrete areas and are not associated with widespread areas of muscle tenderness (as with fibromyalgia);
  - D. 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 two sets of injections* at least seven 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.

- II. It is the policy of PHW that *additional trigger point injections (up to four)* are **medically necessary** when all of the following criteria are met:
  - A. Prior injections resulted in  $\geq 50\%$  pain relief with functional improvement for  $\geq 6$  weeks;
  - B. There was a return of pain and/or deterioration following  $\geq 6$  weeks of improvement;
  - C. Injections are given in the neck, shoulder, and/or back;
  - D. Injections are given at least two months apart for up to 12 months from the initial injection (maximum of six total sessions);

## CLINICAL POLICY

### Trigger Point Injections

- E. 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.

**III.** It is the policy of PHW that current evidence does not support the use of trigger point therapies for the following indications, because although there are ongoing studies, there is little scientifically based data suggesting 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, hyperirritable 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.<sup>12</sup>

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 three trials.<sup>1,2,3,11,14</sup> The North American Spine Society (NASS) concluded there is insufficient evidence to make a recommendation for or against the use of trigger point injections in the treatment of low back pain and that the type of injectate does not influence outcomes.<sup>15</sup> Another systematic review found that intramuscular injection of lidocaine more effectively relieved neck pain in the short term than placebo.<sup>4</sup>

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. Secondary outcomes such as pain, disability, and quality of life were also investigated without confirmed benefit of botulinum injections.<sup>6</sup> Furthermore, there was moderate evidence from five high quality trials that botulinum toxin-A had similar effects to saline in improving pain in patients with chronic neck disorders.<sup>4</sup>

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.<sup>7,11</sup>

### Coding Implications

## CLINICAL POLICY

### Trigger Point Injections

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#### 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

Reviews, Revisions, and Approvals	Revision Date	Approval Date
New policy split from retired CP.MP.118 Injections for Pain Management. No criteria changes.	09/18	10/18
References reviewed and updated. Specialist review. Added CPT Grid Headers. CPT 20560 and 20561 added as not supporting coverage criteria.	6/2020	7/2021
References reviewed and updated. Specialist review. I.B.4: Changed maximum of 6 injections/year to 4. Added ICD-10 code M79.18 and changed M79.1 to M79.12. References reviewed and updated.	6/2021	
Annual review. Referenced reviewed and updated. Updated criteria II. to replace “not medically necessary” with “current evidence does not support.” Changed “review date” in the header to “date of last revision” and “date” in the revision log header to “revision date.” Replaced member with member/enrollee. Reviewed by specialist.	7/29/2022	
Annual review. Updated criteria in I.B. from 2 additional injections to 4. In I.B.1 added pain relief with functional improvement, in I.B.2. added “≥” 6 weeks, and in I.B.4 added “from initial injection” and changed maximum of 4 total sessions to 6. Minor rewording with no clinical significance. Background updated. ICD-10 Diagnosis code table removed. References reviewed, updated, and reformatted. Specialist reviewed.	08/2023	

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