

Clinical Policy: Cochlear Implant Replacements

Reference Number: PA.CP.MP.14

Effective Date: 01/18

Date of Last Review: 8/31/2021

Revision Log

Coding Implications

Description

This policy outlines medical necessity criteria for the replacement of cochlear implants and/or cochlear implant components. The cochlear implant has 4 basic components: a microphone, worn externally behind the ear, which picks up sounds; an external speech processor which converts sounds to electrical signals; a transmitter and receiver/stimulator which forward the signals; and implanted electrodes, which stimulate the fibers of the auditory nerve.

Policy/Criteria

- I. It is the policy of Pennsylvania Health and Wellness® (PHW) that **replacement** of a cochlear implant(s) and/or its external components (external speech processor, controller, etc.) is considered **medically necessary** when any one of the following is present:
 - A. The existing device(s) is no longer functional and cannot be repaired; or
 - B. A change in the member/enrollee's condition makes the existing unit(s) inadequate for the hearing-related activities of daily living and improvement is expected with a replacement unit(s); or
 - C. A sound processor replacement if the current processor is at least five years old.
- II. It is the policy of PHW that **replacement or upgrade** of an existing, properly functioning cochlear implant and/or its external components (external speech processor, controller, etc.) is considered **not medically necessary** when requested only for convenience or to simply upgrade to a newer technology.

Background

Sensorineural hearing loss, or nerve deafness, is a type of hearing loss that results from problems with the inner ear, related to the cochlea, eighth nerve, internal auditory canal, or brain. A common cause of hearing loss in adults is presbycusis, a progressive condition caused by the loss of function of hair cells in the inner ear. Severe to profound hearing loss in children most often is caused by genetics, prenatal, perinatal, or postnatal causes. A cochlear implant, an electronic device surgically placed under the skin, bypasses the hair cells and directly transmits sounds through multiple electrodes, which stimulate the auditory nerve. Once the auditory nerve is activated, signals are sent to the brain. The brain learns to recognize these signals and the person experiences this as hearing.

Cochlear implants have been studied since the 1950s and were approved by the FDA in adults in the mid-1980s. National Institute of Health (NIH) scientists determined cochlear implants to be cost beneficial. The cost of cochlear implantation, adjustments and training averages \$60,000 whereas the services, special education and adaptation related to a child that is deaf before age three costs more than \$1 million.

Recent studies have been conducted evaluating the use of bilateral cochlear implants compared to unilateral implants. Many of these studies have shown that children obtained significantly higher hearing thresholds in the bilateral implants. Speech recognition scores in quiet and noisy

CLINICAL POLICY

Cochlear Implant Replacements



conditions were also improved in bilateral users. Studies also have shown better scores on sentence and word recognition tests for bilateral users.

Very little data has been published comparing differences between bilateral cochlear implants and cochlear implant with a hearing aid on the opposite ear. One small study showed improved localization abilities and speech perception scores for two former users of cochlear implant/hearing aid within the first 6 months after the second implant was activated. However, performance showed a slight decline after 6 months of use. Further studies are needed in this area to determine efficacy for bilateral cochlear implants in adults.

While evidence is increasing regarding the use of bilateral implants, bilateral implantation is not without problems. Limited nerve survival that remains may be asymmetrical, resulting in an unnatural pattern of neural activity in stimulation with electrical pulses. This asynchronous stimulation across devices might result in individual neural impulses which are unlikely to result in useful cues related to interaural differences. Also, bilateral implantation doubles the risks associated with surgical intervention and is very costly.

Coding Implications

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| CPT®* Codes | Description |
|-------------|-------------------------------|
| 69949 | Unlisted procedure, inner ear |

| HCPCS Codes | Description |
|-------------|---|
| L8615 | Headset/headpiece for use with cochlear implant device, replacement |
| L8616 | Microphone for use with cochlear implant device, replacement |
| L8617 | Transmitting coil for use with cochlear implant device, replacement |
| L8618 | Transmitter cable for use with cochlear implant device, replacement |
| L6819 | Cochlear implant, external speech processor and controller, integrated system, replacement |
| L8621 | Zinc air battery for use with cochlear implant device and auditory Osseo integrated sound processors, replacement |
| L8622 | Alkaline battery for use with cochlear implant device, any size, replacement |
| L8623 | Lithium-ion battery for use with cochlear implant device speech processor, other than ear level replacement |
| L8624 | Lithium-ion battery for use with cochlear implant device speech-processor, ear level replacement, each |

CLINICAL POLICY
Cochlear Implant Replacements



| HCPCS Codes | Description |
|-------------|--|
| L8627 | Cochlear implant, external speech processor, component, replacement |
| L8628 | Cochlear implant, external controller component, replacement |
| L8629 | Transmitting coil and cable, integrated, for use with cochlear implant device, replacement |

ICD-10-CM Diagnosis Codes that Support Coverage Criteria

| ICD-10-CM Code | Description |
|----------------|--|
| H90.3 | Sensorineural hearing loss, bilateral |
| H90.41 | Sensorineural hearing loss, unilateral, right ear, with unrestricted hearing on the contralateral side |
| H90.42 | Sensorineural hearing loss, unilateral, left ear, with unrestricted hearing on the contralateral side |
| H90.5 | Unspecified sensorineural hearing loss |
| Q85.00 | Neurofibromatosis, unspecified |
| Q85.02 | Neurofibromatosis, type 2 |
| Z96.21 | Cochlear implant status |

| Reviews, Revisions, and Approvals | Review Date | Approval Date |
|--|-------------|---------------|
| PA policy developed | 09/17 | 01/18 |
| Annual Review. References reviewed and updated. | 09/18 | |
| Added criteria for sound replacement if it is over 5 years old. | 12/18 | |
| Removed CPT 69717 and 69718 and replaced with CPT 69949 References reviewed and updated. Codes reviewed. | 06/2020 | 8/7/2020 |
| Annual review. References reviewed and updated. Coding reviewed, added codes L8621 and L8622. Replaced all instance of “member” with “member/enrollee.” Changed “review date” in the header to “date of last revision” and “date” in the revision log header to “revision date.” | 8/31/2021 | 10/07/2021 |

References

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3. Fedoseev VI, Milesina NA, Bakhshinyan VV. Reoperations after cochlear implantation. *Acta Otolaryngol.* 2000 Mar;120(2):160-3. doi: 10.1080/000164800750000829.
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CLINICAL POLICY

Cochlear Implant Replacements

5. Year 2019 position statement: Principles and guidelines for early hearing detection and intervention programs. *J Early Hear Detect Interv.* 2019; 4(2):1-44.
6. Local coverage article: billing and coding: external components for cochlear implants (A53709). Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services Web site. <http://www.cms.hhs.gov/mcd/search.asp>. Published October 1, 2015 (revised November 7, 2019). Accessed June 17, 2021.